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FRANK SPEAK WITH  
**RAJKUMMAR  
RAO**

**BOBBY  
DEOL**  
BANG FOR  
THE BUCK

NASEERUDDIN  
SHAH:  
**THE  
LEGEND**

THE STORK'S  
VISITING  
**ALIA  
BHATT**

**TAPSEE  
PANNU**  
RIGHT ON TARGET



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PHOTOGRAPHS: AJAY KADAM  
STYLIST: LAKSHMI LEHR | HAIR: AMIT THAKUR | MAKE-UP: GUIA BIANCHI

Denim Overcoat: Diksha Khanna  
Rings: Misho

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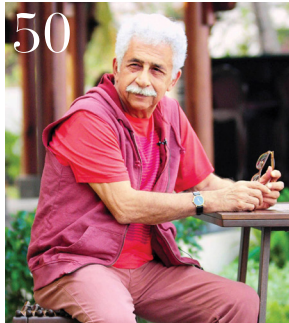
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# Letter from the Editor

## Shabaash Pannu!

In the forthcoming *Shabaash Mithu*, Taapsee Pannu is enacting the life of Mithali Raj, one of the most celebrated women cricketers in India. While it's true that the women in blue don't enjoy the same popularity as their male counterparts, their fame gained momentum when they became the runners-up in the 2017 Women's World Cup. Mithali is the highest run-scorer in women's international cricket and is considered to be one of the greatest female cricketers ever. She's the only female cricketer to surpass the 7,000 run mark in women's one-day international matches. She also holds the record for most half-centuries in WODIs. She became the first player from India, male or female, to score 2000 runs in T20Is, and was India's captain from 2004 to 2022. She completed 20 years in international cricket in 2019.

Mithali's voyage doesn't just have individual records as a milestone. She also fought for better rights for women cricketers since the beginning of her career, asking for better arrangements, uniforms, and pay. The film reportedly encompasses all the aspects of her journey, and in her interview, Taapsee comments that she had a hard time getting under the skin of her character, and her own personality is diametrically opposite to that of Mithali.

Taapsee is no stranger to playing athletes. In *Rashmi Rocket* (2021), she played a runner who has excess male hormones in her body and hence had to fight to be medically accepted as a woman. *Loop Lapeta* (2021), which was an official remake of the hit German film, *Run Lola Run*, again saw her playing an athlete who is made to run from one corner of her town to another in order to save the life of her boyfriend. In *Saand Ki Aankh* (2019), she played a pistol shooter who got into the sport at the age of 60 plus. While in *Soorma* (2019), she played a female hockey player who encourages the hero to take up the sport. We should also mention that she showed prowess as a martial artist in both *Baby* (2015) and its prequel, *Naam Shabana* (2017). It's the first time she's playing a bonafide cricketer in Mithali Raj's biopic.

But in all these films, apart from her athleticism, what stood out was her ability to tease out minute nuances of her character. She infused her characters with a gentle warmth and made them stand out as well-rounded individuals. Her sincerity and her conviction while portraying the characters stand out, as does her intensity. Taapsee Pannu is on our cover this month. Turn the pages to learn more about the career choices of this gritty actress, who says she's been living the best days of her life currently.



*Jitesh Pillai*

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asha.kulkarni@wwm.co.in

SENIOR MANAGER SUBSCRIPTION

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a bird's-eye view of show town's happenings

# masala fix

## THREE TO TANGO

The posters of *Shamshera* are out and fans are going wild seeing Ranbir Kapoor's dacoit avatar. The actor is reportedly playing his first double role in the film, essaying the role of both father and son. Sanjay Dutt is reportedly playing the protagonist and his confrontation scenes with Ranbir are supposed to be the highlight of the film. Vaani Kapoor plays an important role in the film and those who have inside knowledge of the film swear by their chemistry. Vaani was last seen playing a trans woman in *Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui* and would be seen in a diametrically opposite avatar in this period drama. Ranbir was last seen in *Sanju* (2018) and fans are eagerly awaiting his return to the silver screen after a gap of four years.

Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor are pregnant *pg 06*

Has *Hera Pheri 3* starring Akshay Kumar, Suniel Shetty, and Paresh Rawal been confirmed? *pg 07*

PHOTOGRAPH: YOGEN SHAH





# Rumours & More

## ALIA AND RANBIR ARE PREGNANT

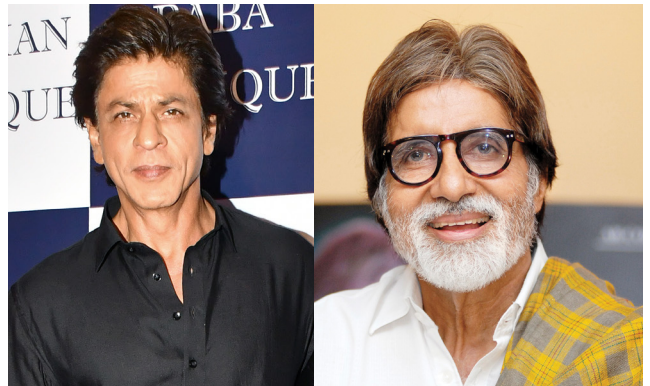
**Alia Bhatt** and **Ranbir Kapoor** are going to become parents soon. The actress shared a picture of herself with Ranbir Kapoor from a hospital. The lovebirds who tied the knot on April 14, had one of the dreamiest Bollywood weddings of all time. Just when we thought the news could not get any bigger, Alia Bhatt took to social media to announce her first pregnancy. She shared a post on Instagram which shows her staring at a sonography screen with a big red emoji on it. It is indeed big news. This year is special for more reasons than one. They got married, their first child is on its way, and it's the year of *Brahmastra*. Here's wishing the best to Alia Bhatt and Ranbir Kapoor.



### THE LATE RISHI KAPOOR'S ADVICE TO RANBIR ON FATHERHOOD

**Alia Bhatt** and **Ranbir Kapoor** are soon going to be parents, and the internet is in a tizzy alright. Ranbir's late father, **Rishi Kapoor**, is sorely missed during this momentous time for the Kapoor family. The actor, who passed

away two years ago, had once shared his thoughts about fatherhood and Ranbir Kapoor starting a family. In an old interview, Rishi Kapoor opened up about his bond with his son and the kind of bond he hoped Ranbir would have with his kid. "He (Raj Kapoor) did not have time for his children. Either he was working for someone, or he was directing and starring in his own movies. So when I became a father, I decided to not shoot on Sundays and dedicate that day to my kids." He added, "I know what I missed out with my father, so I made sure to fill in those gaps. Likewise, I am sure Ranbir will do something with his kid that he missed out on with me. I think I have inculcated a sense of tradition and culture in that boy." Wise words indeed.



## WILL AMITABH BACHCHAN AND SHAH RUKH KHAN TEAM UP FOR DON 3?

**Shah Rukh Khan's** *Don* franchise, directed by **Farhan Akhtar**, is one series that has left fans eager for more. Buzz around *Don 3* has emerged over the past few years as the film is reportedly in the works. And now, it looks like there's an exciting update coming from the makers. In *Don 3*, we will likely see **Amitabh Bachchan** and Shah Rukh Khan team up in a crossover of our dreams. As per reports, Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan might share screen space in *Don 3*. Speculations around the film resurfaced when Big B shared a black and white photo of a massive crowd outside a theatre for his film, which arrived in 1978. Meanwhile, there are also multiple reports of a *Don 3* script in the works. Excel Entertainment is eyeing a sequel to *Don 2* (2011). While details about the next instalment are being kept under wraps, the possibility of two Bollywood legends returning to the franchise is exciting indeed.

### FANS BELIEVE THIS RARE ALIA-RANBIR PHOTO IS FROM THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

**NEETU KAPOOR** RECENTLY POSTED A LOVEY-DOVEY PHOTO OF SOON-TO-BE PARENTS **ALIA BHATT** AND **RANBIR KAPOOR** AGAINST A SCENIC BACKDROP. THE TWO LOOK ADORABLE TOGETHER AS USUAL. NEETU CAPTIONED THE PICTURE "GOD BLESS" WITH A HEART EMOJI. EAGLE-EYED FANS HAVE SPOTTED A TINY BOX IN RANBIR KAPOOR'S HANDS, AND THEY'RE CONVINCED THAT THE PIC WAS TAKEN DURING THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL. MEANWHILE, WHEN THE PAPARAZZI CONGRATULATED NEETU KAPOOR ON HER SOON BECOMING A DADI, SHE BEAMED WITH JOY AND EXCLAIMED, "IT'S LIKE THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD."





## VIKRAM VEDHA MAKERS SAY THE HRITHIK-SAIF STARRER WILL NOT BE BOLLYWOODISED



**Hrithik Roshan** and **Saif Ali Khan** are coming together for *Vikram Vedha*. The film is the Hindi adaptation of the 2017 Tamil film of the same name, which featured **R Madhavan** and **Vijay Sethupathi**. Filmmaker duo **Pushkar** and **Gayatri**, who directed the original film, are also directing the Hindi remake. The two have now opened up about the film. In an interview with a leading daily, the duo shared that they did not face any pressure from the producers. Pushkar explained, "We know how to make films in a certain way, and we will stick to that only. I hope people don't think of it as being 'Bollywoodised' or anything." He added, "There has been no pressure from the producers or distributors saying films here have to be made a certain way. Nobody has had that conversation with us." Gayatri also shared that they signed on to retain the elements that made the original work. Pushkar further added that the film's scale is much larger.



### ANIL KAPOOR CONFIRMS THE SEQUEL TO NO ENTRY

IN A RECENT INTERVIEW, **ANIL KAPOOR** CONFIRMED THAT A SEQUEL TO *NO ENTRY* WITH **SALMAN KHAN** AND FILMMAKER **ANEES BAZMEE** WILL BE MADE. HE ALSO MENTIONED THAT THE TIMELINE FOR THE SHOOT WILL BE DECIDED UPON SOON BY ANEES AND SALMAN. *NO ENTRY* WAS RELEASED IN 2005, AND CENTRED AROUND THE LIVES OF ANIL KAPOOR AND **FARDEEN KHAN** AS FRUSTRATED HUSBANDS. THEIR LIVES TAKE AN INTERESTING TURN WHEN SALMAN KHAN COMES INTO THE PICTURE. THE MOVIE ALSO STARRED **BIPASHA BASU**, **LARA DUTTA**, **ESHA DEOL**, AND **CELINA JAITLEY** IN PIVOTAL ROLES.



### HAS HERA PHERI 3 STARRING AKSHAY KUMAR, SUNIEL SHETTY, AND PARESH RAWAL BEEN CONFIRMED?

*Hera Pheri*, the cult classic comedy, is getting another sequel. The first film, which was released in 2000, featured **Akshay Kumar**, **Suniel Shetty**, and **Paresh Rawal**. The stars reprised their roles as the original trio in the second film, *Phir Hera Pheri*, which was released in 2006. Since then, fans have been waiting for a third instalment. And now, it looks like we're closer than ever to getting it. According to reports, producer **Firoz Nadiadwala** has confirmed *Hera Pheri 3*, with Akshay Kumar, Suniel Shetty, and Paresh Rawal returning to the comedy film franchise. He said that fans will get to see the film "very soon with the same star cast." He added, "The story is in place, and we are working on certain modalities. It'll be made in the same way, retaining the innocence of the characters." So far, the film's director has not been locked in, but an announcement is reportedly coming soon.

## DEEPIKA TO TEAM-UP WITH SHAH RUKH IN ATLEE'S JAWAN?

**Deepika Padukone** has a busy line-up of much-anticipated films. The actress is currently working on *Project K* with **Prabhas**, among other projects. And now, it seems she's up for yet another big-screen appearance. We're hearing rumours that Deepika will appear in a cameo in **Atlee's** film *Jawan*, featuring **Shah Rukh Khan** and **Nayanthara**. Deepika Padukone is reportedly in talks with director Atlee and Shah Rukh Khan to play a "short but significant" role in *Jawan*. The report also suggests that the actress has been almost finalised for the cameo but is yet to sign the deal. While there has been no official confirmation and no specifics about Deepika's involvement have been revealed, it will be interesting to see how she will play a role in the upcoming film. *Jawan's* first poster and teaser arrived a while ago, and we've already seen the intense first glimpse of a bandaged Shah Rukh Khan from the film. The film arrives in cinemas on June 2, 2023.





## AAMIR THOUGHT KAREENA WOULD RUN AWAY FROM LAAL SINGH CHADDHA'S SHOOT

When it's an **Aamir Khan** film, you know there are a lot of expectations riding on it and it's double that when **Kareena Kapoor Khan** comes in to play the female lead. *Laal Singh Chaddha* is the official Hindi remake of the **Tom Hanks**-starrer *Forrest Gump*. Recently, a video surfaced online where both Kareena and Aamir are seen discussing the song titled *Phir na aisi raat ayegi*. The video that was shared online comically hints that Aamir Khan was afraid that Kareena might run away from the shoot of the film. In the video, Kareena is seen humming to the tunes of the song and expressing to the camera team that it is her favourite number from the film. The camera pans to Aamir, who replies to Kareena's remark by stating, "Ye gaana sunke Kareena ne bola"—this is the song of the decade. *Ye ab main usko sunaunga toh boligi, yeh kya kardia. Heroine apni bhaag jayegi.* *Laal Singh Chaddha* is slated to be released on August 11.

## KRITI SANON WANTS FILMS STARRING FEMALE PROTAGONISTS TO HAVE BIGGER BUDGETS

**Kriti Sanon** has often spoken out about films with female protagonists. In a recent interview, the actress cited *Mother India* and *ChaalBaaz* as examples where strong and substantial characters were created in the past. She stated that the number of such characters has increased in modern times. However, budgets have not increased. She said that **Alia Bhatt's** *Gangubai Kathiawadi* may be the only film with a female protagonist made on such a large scale, and that this is how it should be. "Sometimes, we end up making films around female protagonists at a smaller budget because we feel that it's not going to do as much business. And it also doesn't end up doing as much business because it is made on a smaller scale," She noted. The actress went on to say, "That conviction and risk is something that I want to see. I hope it becomes the norm." We hope so too.



## AISHWARYA REVEALS WHY ABHISHEK IS SPECIAL

**Aishwarya Rai Bachchan** and **Abhishek**

**Bachchan** are one of the most well-known power couples in Bollywood. They got married in a private ceremony in Mumbai in 2007. The couple has always been in the spotlight since then. Even after 15 years of togetherness, fans are still smitten by them and eager to learn more about them. In one of her interviews, Aishwarya explained why Abhishek is special. "He's special because he's himself. He's a normal guy. When he walks into a room, he carries his lineage and his upbringing. It's all out there in the obvious, yet you know he's a guy in the room you can have a conversation with, you can hang out with, you can have fun with, you can have an intense conversation with. He's someone who'll have a straight face even as he jokes with you. He was born into showbiz and he has a lineage to carry. Despite all that, there's nothing showbiz about him. That's the nicest part. He's relatable and engaging as a person. And he's my man, the father of my child."



## HAS SHRADDHA AGREED TO A PREQUEL TO STREE?

WHILE THE 2018 HIT HORROR COMEDY *STREE*, STARRING **SHRADDHA KAPOOR** AND **RAJKUMMAR RAO**, HAD AN OPEN ENDING, THE CREATORS WANT TO GIVE IT A BACKSTORY. ACCORDING TO REPORTS, **DINESH VIJAN** INTENDS TO FEATURE THE JOURNEY OF THE GIRL WHO BECAME *STREE*, AND THE STORY WILL INCLUDE SHRADDHA KAPOOR REPRISING HER ROLE. THIS PREQUEL IS EXPECTED TO BEGIN PRODUCTION LATER THIS YEAR. SHRADDHA KAPOOR WILL BE SEEN WITH **RANBIR KAPOOR** IN **LUV RANJAN'S** UNTITLED NEXT FILM. IN ADDITION, SHRADDHA KAPOOR WILL STAR IN *NAAGIN*, WHICH WILL BE DIRECTED BY **VISHAL FURIA**.





# preview

movies on the block, set-talk,  
talent-buzz, hotties to watch out for

## AAGAZ AKHTAR

### PEDDLING DREAMS

#### X FACTOR: ENJOYS HUSTLING

Aagaz Akhtar has done everything, from peddling movie cassettes on the street to working as an assistant director and full-time model.

He's worked as a bouncer, sold clothes, sold doormats, trained a celebrity, and done many other duties behind the camera. All this to somehow fund and fulfil his dreams of becoming an actor. Like all parents, his mum and dad were also concerned about the uncertainty of his career, but they saw the hunger in his eyes and his immense self-confidence. He's worked as a model and an actor for over 60 different brands. He's done TVCs for well-known Indian and international FMCG brands, as also fitness and innerwear brands. He's done e-commerce and print ads for more than 30 designers and brands. With a willingness to experiment with different looks and ideas, he's definitely someone to watch out for.

Newbies Jai Basantu  
Singh and Gaurav Arora  
share their hopes and  
desires pg 22



# For the people

— ////////////// —  
**Jai Basantu Singh's** directorial debut *Janhit Mein Jaari* talked about safe sex and condom usage. **Tanisha Bhattacharya** talks to filmmaker who believes in espousing causes  
 — ////////////// —



**H**elming a film like *Janhit Mein Jaari* with a female lead takes a lot of conviction. Jai Basantu Singh believed that the film's story wasn't just meant to entertain but to educate as well. The film narrated the tale of a woman who broke all societal norms by first becoming a salesperson for condoms and then taking up a crusade for safe sex, branding condoms as tools

for women's safety, rather than pleasure. Ask him what attracted him towards this particular story, and he credits writer and producer Raaj Shaandilyaa for its genesis. Raaj came to him with a story about a girl selling condoms, and Jai immediately wanted to write a screenplay around it. He knew that the mere mention of condoms is considered taboo in our society, and so the challenge was to normalise it with dignity and to make



**IF CONDOMS WERE USED FOR PLEASURE, THEN WE WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH A POPULATION EXPLOSION. WE WOULDN'T BE DEALING WITH 1.5 CRORE ABORTIONS PER YEAR OR 10 LAKH DEATHS DUE TO ILLEGAL ABORTIONS**



people laugh at the same time. Educating people about its benefits without being preachy was another target. "As a responsible filmmaker, director, and writer, I was blown away by this idea that I should say something and do something for my nation through my filmmaking.



I was fortunate to have my first film be a women-centric film, with which I am saying something to my country," he gushes.

**T**he director says that his goal has always been to educate and entertain, not to titillate. He didn't make a cheap sex comedy, but a family film that can be watched by everyone. He said his chief aim was to remind people that condoms have always been about protection and not pleasure. "If condoms were used for pleasure, then we wouldn't have been dealing with a population explosion. We wouldn't be dealing with 1.5 crore abortions per year or 10 lakh deaths due to illegal abortions. I was nonplussed when I came across these figures. All this can easily be avoided if men decide to use condoms regularly for the safety of their women. That's the message I wanted to convey," he asserts. Also, he wanted to tell women to buy condoms and keep them handy if men are hesitant to do so. "Women should always insist on condoms. And if a man says he doesn't have them, then they should take them out of their purses and give them to him. We've always targeted men as consumers of condoms, and it's high time that women are encouraged to buy them for the sake of their own safety," he points out.

Nushratt Bharuccha was always his first choice for the protagonist. He was aware that she hadn't done this kind of role before.



He says she's a director's actress and took to his directions like a duck takes to water. "I'm a newbie but she showed complete faith in me and understood what I was trying to say through the film. She too was appalled at the data we received about abortion deaths and was completely in agreement about the fact that condoms can go a long way towards preventing those. Once an actor is convinced about something, then his or her job becomes that much easier, and that was the case with Nushratt as well," he informs.

Jai started his showbiz journey by making ad films. He has directed around 650 campaigns so far and is used to the idea of pushing across an idea in a span of 30 seconds. He graduated to doing TV shows next and was part of series like *Jeannie Aur Juju*, *Ishq Ka Rang Safed* and *Ek Duj Ke Vaaste 2*. "I know

**I'M A NEWBIE BUT SHE SHOWED COMPLETE FAITH IN ME... ONCE AN ACTOR IS CONVINCED ABOUT SOMETHING, THEN HIS OR HER JOB BECOMES THAT MUCH EASIER, AND THAT WAS THE CASE WITH NUSHRRATT AS WELL**

the value of cinematic time. I know how to tell a story in 30 seconds, in 30 minutes and now in two hours. My past experience helped me in charting out a graph where different things happen after a gap of time, and the constant change keeps the viewers engaged." All the TV shows he directed were set in small towns like Kanpur, Banaras, Lucknow, and Mathura, and that gave him a grounding on how to go about shooting in Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh for *Janhit*. Shooting in the midst of a semi-urban town with a full unit in the middle of a pandemic wasn't easy, and Jai thanks the MP government, as well as the local populace, for coming to his aid and making sure

of his comfort. "People in small towns are very welcoming. They make you their own in no time. And the government helped us in their own way, making sure there were no hurdles in our way."

He's proud of his TV lineage and says TV has given us directors like Aanand L Rai, Anurag Basu, Anubhav Sinha, Neeraj Pandey, and SS Rajamouli—all of whom are his inspirations. "Whatever I'm today is through my learning from television. I've put whatever I've learnt from 20 years of doing TV into my first film, and I'm glad it's been appreciated." Ask him if he found it difficult to handle both the writing and the directing departments, and he reveals he prefers it that way. "If the director is writing the film's screenplay, then he's bound to know the minute nuances of it, and that makes a big difference. Actually, let me be honest and reveal that I wasn't the director of the film at first. I was just the screenwriter and used to narrate it to interested parties without even once glancing at my notes. That's when the studio decided that I'd be the best person to direct it. You can say that writing made me become a director."

He feels that humour is his forte, and he'll continue to invest in humour in whatever he makes next. "Humour is a potent tool. Whether it's a social drama, a horror film, or an action film, I'll utilise humour to push the story forward in whatever genre I take up next." ■

# LOVE BYTES

MAYUKH MAJUMDAR TALKS TO GAURAV ARORA, WHO'S GETTING PLENTY OF APPLAUSE FOR HIS ROLE IN THE ROMANTIC SERIES AADHA ISHQ



Gaurav Arora's debut, *Love Games*, capitalised on his sex appeal, chiselled jawline and fit physique. The movie, which also starred Patralekhaa and Tara Alisha Berry, was all about the high life—sex, drugs, and rock and roll. However, it was with *Raaz: Reboot* that he achieved a sense of critical acclaim for his intense role. His career went on a downward spiral from then on, but the handsome hunk seems to have bounced back with OTT series like *Aadha Ishq* and *Asur 2*.

The Madhya Pradesh native's initial fame came from modelling. He shot to stardom after his stint

at the Gladrags Manhunt and Megamodel Contest in 2006. He went on to work with some of the biggest names in fashion, namely Manish Malhotra, Rohit Bal, Tarun Tahiliani, and Raghavendra Rathore. "I always wanted to be an actor, even back in school. Everyone thought it was a childish whim at that time, but it was consistently there for me throughout. While I was in the 10th or 12th grade, I saw all these models get into films. As a result, I believed it was possible. Then, I came to Mumbai with this frame of mind that I'd get into modelling, make a name for myself and then get into acting. But people believed that models couldn't act by that point in time." Acting

“I always wanted to be an actor, even back in school. Everyone thought it was a childish whim at that time, but it was consistently there for me throughout”





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was always a priority. He started doing a lot of theatre and workshops. That gave him a lot of time to hone his craft, and he emerged the better for it.

We've all heard whispers of the infamous casting couch in the modelling and film industries. Gaurav smiles at that and mentions that every story has so many facets to it and we often look at things with a bias in our minds. "No one will ever force you to do anything. No one is going to put a gun to your head and ask you to do anything. Maybe some person in a position of power can make use of that, but if you don't want to do it, don't do it. If you have talent and you are hard-working, it will take time, but you will achieve

what you want to. These are just shortcuts to achieve success quickly," Gaurav candidly reveals.

Gaurav was last seen in *Aadha Ishq*, which has an interesting storyline—a mother and her daughter fall in love with the same guy. He says one of the reasons he decided to do the show is because it is so different from what we see on OTT platforms these days. And, of course, there was the added benefit of it being shot in Kashmir. "It is a very intense love story, but having said that, the hook line when they were narrating the story—a mother and daughter falling in love with the same guy—intriguing me a lot. When you see the OTT space, it is filled with all

these murder mysteries, political dramas, and documentaries nowadays. I thought this was fresh and they told me they were planning to shoot in Kashmir in the snow, a love story there with all those twists and turns. It was very interesting to me the first time I heard it," he mentions.

He was shooting for his thriller series, *Asur 2*, when this offer came his way. It's on the same platform as *Asur* and the makers liked what he was doing in season 2 and hence offered him another series as well. He believes that love stories always work. "I think people love the idea of falling in love. There's a lot of poetry in the show. The locations are charming, but it deals with modern-day relationships and their complexities. I thought it

would be a good thing for me as an actor as it would be a variation of what I had already done."

There is a fair amount of heartbreak in *Aadha Ishq*. In fact, in one scene, Gaurav's character, Saahir, even wonders aloud if we need pain to create art. "I think it is important for every person to experience love and heartbreak in their life. Rock bottom has given the maximum champions. It is just how you look at things. It has not made me bitter for sure," he asserts.

When his films initially didn't do well, he used to be affected by the failures. But, with time, he learnt how to rein in the negative emotions and use them to obtain positive results. "If you experience failure, make sure you always learn from it. So I don't think I take professional failures so seriously because no one around me will. They will forget and move on with life. There is so much coming every other day that people move on."

For now, the actor is looking forward to his next release, *Asur 2*. OTT has offered him a chance to showcase his skills and given him much-needed job satisfaction. "No matter how massive the release is, no matter how much you promote something, if it doesn't connect, it just doesn't. I was watching *A Thursday*, and I enjoyed watching that film. I would've watched it in theatres as well. Good content will find its audience sooner or later. I think you should not play it safe anymore."



*Aadha Ishq*

“I think it is important for every person to experience love and heartbreak in their life. Rock bottom has given the maximum champions”



# F&B

*fashion and beauty*

They are hot, they are cool.  
Meet our trend makers and breakers



**“WHEN SOMEONE STEPS INTO A GAURI NAINIKA DRESS, THEY ARE TRANSPORTED TO A DIFFERENT WORLD. THEY STEP INTO THE SHOES OF A PRINCESS OR A BOLLYWOOD STAR OR A MOVIE STAR BECAUSE IT IS LIKE HIGH-STYLE GLAMOUR RIGHT NOW” – Gauri and Nainika**

Designer duo Gauri and Nainika come clean on their influences.



# MODERN VINTAGE

Designer duo **GAURI** and **NAINIKA** have been inspired by vintage Hollywood to create their signature creations. **TANISHA BHATTACHARYA** hunts down their secrets

**G**auri-Nainika and their bespoke brand serves as an elegant melange of flamboyance and extravagance. With an eclectic spread of flouncy gowns featuring romantic ruffles, flowy silhouettes, and dreamy pastels, every element beautifully moulds itself into feminine designs. This women-led brand has seen Bollywood's A-listers like Deepika Padukone, Alia Bhatt, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit, and Kareena Kapoor Khan draping themselves in their attires at red carpet events. Raking in love from the vintage world of glamour, the designer duo have envisioned a dramatic spread of elaborate gowns with exaggerated details. In an exclusive interview, they talk about the driving force behind their vivid imaginations, the feeling of gratitude of having Bollywood divas sport their gorgeous ensembles, and how far they've come with their dream of becoming the go-to brand when it comes to western wear. Excerpts:

**How does it feel to be the favourite designer for all the top Bollywood divas when it comes to red carpet ensembles?**

**Gauri:** I think when we started, more than fifteen years ago, we didn't think that 'okay, we are designing gowns that are floor-length with long trains and we did not think that we'd be worn by celebrities.' We

just designed them because we wanted to. We didn't think about who was going to wear them or buy them. At that point, no one was wearing gowns, like none of the actresses were wearing gowns on the red carpet. They used to be wearing sarees and all. It started with celebrities wearing our gowns. It first started with



Gauri and Nainika



Katrina Kaif

We used to watch a lot of old Hollywood films, and I think that's where our love for glamorous and timeless evening wear for women started, which is very formal and elegant



Aishwarya Rai and Bipasha Basu, who started to wear our gowns, and it just kind of really took off from there because other celebrities noticed, and then we started dressing celebrities often. At that time, actresses did not have any stylists, so we used to get calls from actresses, their offices, or their managers, and then we used to meet them, so it was all very personal. We used to sit with Aishwarya and decide how it would go. We used to sit with Katrina Kaif and Bipasha, and it was a lot of fun because we started designing gowns for them and soon they all started wearing our gowns. Suddenly, a lot of actresses were wearing our gowns for their red carpets and premieres, especially Aishwarya Rai, Katrina Kaif, and Deepika Padukone.

**Nainika:** Deepika wore our gown for her first Filmfare Awards, for *Om Shanti Om*, where she won the Filmfare Award for Best Debut. That was very special to Gauri and me, and we were very happy about it. It was like finding that you've imagined something and people have loved and worn it, but no one else was doing it at that time. It was a lot of fun, and it was probably a



Some people like making a very bold statement, others like to keep it clean, so yeah, each star has their own style

watershed moment in our careers because women wanted to wear our outfits to special occasions. Every bride started having a black-tie event, a cocktail party, or a bash aimed at youngsters for her wedding. Now it has become common for the bride and the groom to have a party that is black-tie where the

theme is gowns and everything, but then it just started. I think looking at the actresses, a lot of brides started doing that and people started wanting to wear gowns for their special occasions, so occasion dressing took off for us where there was no market for it in India. So it was a lot of fun and, yeah, no

looking back.

**Do you feel your dreamy ensembles have a certain connection with Bollywood fashion?**

**Gauri:** When you say dreamy and Bollywood, the whole thing becomes a fantasy. And Nainika and I say the same thing about our clothes. We always say that when someone steps into a Gauri Nainika dress, they are transported to a different world. They step into the shoes of a princess or a Bollywood star or a movie star because it is like high-style glamour right now. In some ways, we are selling that dream...

**Nainika:** ... I wouldn't say selling the dream but women are living



Alia Bhatt



their dreams in the clothes they buy from us.

**How would you say Bollywood fashion has evolved over the years when it comes to experimenting?**

**Nainika:** Fashion everywhere in the world has become international ever since social media started. The latest couture collections are literally on your mobile phones, done by the biggest designers internationally or done by Indian ones anywhere, right? I would say Indian and Bollywood fashion has become international. You can see Bollywood celebrities wearing international designers, carrying off bold and exaggerated silhouettes. Everyone has got a new statement. It is all about trying out something new and different and having the guts to do so. At red carpet events or film festivals, Indian actresses wear a lot of international designs. I believe that the world has moved forward and become one big place, and Bollywood has become the same way.

**Out of the many stars who've worn your designs, how would you define the individual styles of Deepika Padukone,**

**Alia Bhatt, Katrina Kaif, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, and Kareena Kapoor Khan, who are major fashion icons in the world of cinema?**

**Gauri:** All of them can pretty much carry anything. They are confident and beautiful, and we're sure they could wear anything. But definitely, each has their own style. Some people like making a very bold statement, others like to keep it clean, so yeah, each star has their own style, but yet they also understand that this is a brand that



Deepika Padukone



Deepika Padukone wore our gown for her first Filmfare Awards, for *Om Shanti Om*, where she won the Filmfare Award for Best Debut. That was very special to Gauri and me, and we were very happy about it

they are wearing and that brand has a certain philosophy and they can flaunt that philosophy as well.

**Anyone from your Bollywood wishlist who you're yet to style or are yet to be seen in your designs and you wish it happened soon?**

**Gauri:** It's very hard to say who because they all look fantastic and each time you see any of them wearing something of ours, it's always stunning. Deepika Padukone, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Anushka Sharma, Alia Bhatt, and even the younger girls carry off our ensembles

admiringly. It's always exciting to see someone wearing your clothes and giving them a personality, whether for a magazine editorial or the red carpet. That probably goes for every designer in the world.

**Any long-term plans to design costumes for a Bollywood feature film?**

**Nainika:** We would love to. I mean, we don't have plans, but if there is a film like that, then sure, we will. If our brand would be a fit, then definitely. If some filmmaker is looking for ladylike, European vintage glamour for his next film, we'd be happy to hop on board.

**Your signature styles are ruffles, florals, and easy-breezy silhouettes. How do you devise every collection with the ethos strongly reflected in the designs?**

**Gauri:** It happens automatically because everyone has their own style, their own design sensibility, and an affinity towards a certain kind of style. We have always had that kind of affinity towards old Hollywood, vintage glamour, and rich luxurious fabrics, whether it is satin or pure chiffon, organza, and, like



## 6 TIMES BOLLYWOOD DIVAS SERVED OLD-WORLD CHARM IN GAURI NAINIKA GOWNS



### DEEPIKA PADUKONE

attended the Filmfare Glamour and Style Awards 2017 in an extravagant red gown by Gauri-Nainika. The cherry on top was the gigantic bow at the back that gave a modern-chic touch to her bodycon ensemble.



### KARISMA KAPOOR

chose a shimmery Gauri-Nainika corset dress that came with the dreamy pleated flare that their designs are known for. This was for an inaugural event and she let the dramatic look with a vintage touch reign.



### TAMANNAH BHATIA

went for an extravagant Gauri-Nainika monochrome gown at Cannes 2022. The signature touches of an elaborate ballroom gown silhouette and a dramatic long train made it an iconic look.



### KATRINA KAIF

wore a signature Gauri-Nainika floral pastel dress to celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of her makeup brand. The puffy mutton sleeves, cinched waistline flowing into a swirl-like flair, and the plunging neckline summed up the ace-designer's creation.



### TARA SUTARIA

served a modern twist to a classic black monochrome gown designed with Gauri-Nainika's mermaid silhouette. She wore it as her last look on the promotional tour of *Tadap* and made black look all the more elegant.



### SONAKSHI SINHA

was seen in a Gauri-Nainika teal green dress with a patent silhouette featuring mutton sleeves and a fitted bodice with a thigh-high slit, as she attended the first offline exhibition of her latest art venture.







though the prints are never trend-driven; they are always artistic or very English or European, something that would be relevant even later.

**Tell us a little about the inspiration that led to such a distinct feminine brand.**

**Nainika:** Gauri and I always loved fashion too, because when we were young and growing up, western clothes were not easily available in India. And it all started because we loved fashion and used to try to make our own clothes, and we admired old Hollywood glamour. We also

used to watch a lot of old Hollywood films, and I think that's where our love for glamorous and timeless evening wear for women started, which is very formal and elegant. I think that particular style has come from watching those movies as a young girl loving fashion and wanting to wear those clothes. More than anything else, it didn't matter that people in India did not wear those kinds of particular clothes, we just wanted to create them. So we studied fashion and started our line. We have grown and evolved but still stuck to our brand DNA, which is what we started with; creating timeless, glamorous clothes which are very feminine.

we said, dresses, gowns, and corsets. Whether it was a movie we watched when we were kids or we saw when we were much older, that particular type of silhouette when it comes to any kind of period film with costume design, we used to fall in love with that fashion. It just happens automatically.

**Nainika:** Even if the look of one collection is different from another because we are discovering new fabrics and, of course, being influenced by trends, at some point we might tend to lean more towards a minimal look because, over

the years, that just becomes a trend. But then things changed and eventually, everyone got sick of it and came back, so maximalism has had a huge comeback in the past year. But for us, our design has to always be timeless and something that you can pull out of your wardrobe 10-20 years later and still wear. The fabrics that we use are very luxurious; they are not something that will ever be dated. The quality, the finishing, we pay a lot of attention to our stitching and garment construction. So we feel that our pieces can be worn after twenty years, even



Your design has to always be timeless and something that you can pull out of your wardrobe 10-20 years later and still wear it

**If you were to name some films whose costumes inspired you, which ones would they be from a designer's perspective?**

**Nainika:** There was *To Catch A Thief*, which had Grace Kelly, of course, all the Audrey Hepburn films, and we love period dramas. Not just from the 1930s or 1950s, but also from the *Belle Époque*, or Victorian Era, and we enjoy watching TV shows and films from that era, as well as being inspired by the costumes. ■



what's on their mind?

# exclusives

## *HEARTSPEAK*

**"For someone who never thought of becoming an actress but is now working in a Shah Rukh Khan film, for someone like that, everything is a bonus. That is why I don't easily get bitter. It is better to be thankful, and to count your blessings."**

**Taapsee Pannu talks about acting in Mithali Raj's biopic and her career choices in an exclusive interview**

PHOTOGRAPH: AJAY KADAM





FOR  
THE  
BRAVE  
FAVOURS  
THE



**ANURADHA CHOUDHARY  
CONVERSES WITH THE  
SUPREMELY TALENTED  
TANPSEE PANNU**

PHOTOGRAPHS: AJAY KADAM  
STYLIST: LAKSHMI LEHR  
HAIR: AMIT THAKUR  
MAKE-UP: GUIA BIANCHI  
Blazer: Twenty Dresses  
Pants: Zara | Rings: Misho  
Accessories: Beg Borrow Steal

BRAVE



Denim Overcoat: Diksha Khanna  
Rings: Misho



## ***FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE A DICEY THING.***

***EITHER YOU'RE COMPLETELY RIGHT ABOUT A PERSON  
AFTER JUST ONE MEETING OR YOU'RE COMPLETELY WRONG.***

When you first look at Taapsee Pannu, what hits you is the steely glint in her eyes. That's the first thing that hit us during our first meeting all those years ago and that's something that has stayed even now, after a decade. A star's career is full of ups and downs. How she deals with it defines her in the long run. Some, after facing hardships, become bitter and broody. Some learn from the tough times and smile more and laugh genuinely. After establishing herself down South, Taapsee arrived in Bollywood with the comedy *Chashme Baddoor* (2013). She didn't have a godfather in the industry. After a few hiccups, she got noticed for her seven minute role in *Baby* (2015), and never looked back since. She's made a name for herself choosing issue based films like *Pink* (2016), *Mulk* (2018) and *Thappad* (2020) and is looking forward to the release of her first proper biopic, *Shabaash Mithu*, where she's bringing to screen the life of Mithali Raj, India's longest serving and most decorated woman cricketer. It's ironical that in a cricket crazy country like ours, the common man would be hard pressed to name a woman cricketer of note. So, despite being a biopic, *Shabaash Mithu* is also a homage to the women in blue and hopefully would encourage more girls to take up sports. Excerpts from a heart-to-heart talk with the fiery actress...



**FIRST OF ALL, ARE YOU NERVOUS ABOUT SHABAASH MITHU?**

I am very nervous. Because I'm getting a theatrical release after two years. Plus, I think if you don't get nervous, if you don't get those butterflies, it means you've stopped caring for such things. So in a way, I am happy that it still gives me those butterflies and nervousness. That fear of Friday is slowly making its presence felt again...

**WITH THIS SCENARIO RIGHT NOW, DO YOU THINK PEOPLE ARE GOING TO COME TO THEATRES OR...**

I still feel like going to theatres. The palate of the audience has changed, but that happens every few years. They'll still come to the theatres, but for what kind of film, that we'll only come to know from Friday to Friday.

**SO WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO SHABAASH MITHU?**

Mithali Raj has been the torchbearer or flagbearer of women's cricket. I must confess that I only found out that we also have a women's cricket team in 2017. I got to know about it so late and that too because of a statement she made in the media when she was asked who her favourite male cricketer was. When I read that statement, I got to know that she is the captain of our women's team and that we even have a team. I am embarrassed about the fact that I did not know that we had a team before that. Then I followed the 2017 World Cup and later other matches of the women's team. She has the longest career in ODIs, more than any cricketer in the world. And her statistics are

simply awesome. She's put her foot in the door to provide acceptance for the women's cricket team. And helped provide them with the attention they deserve. This is the ideology I felt I could carry forward through my medium. When we were shooting, she told me she was going to retire soon. Now that she has retired and is a legend


Jacket: Bloni  
Crop top: Zara  
Rings: Misho



**I MUST CONFESS THAT I ONLY FOUND OUT THAT WE ALSO HAVE A WOMEN'S CRICKET TEAM IN 2017.**

**I GOT TO KNOW ABOUT IT SO LATE AND THAT TOO BECAUSE OF A STATEMENT MITHALI MADE IN THE MEDIA WHEN SHE WAS ASKED WHO HER FAVOURITE MALE CRICKETER WAS**






Jacket: Massimo Dutti  
Corset: Zara  
Pants: Two Point Two  
Rings: Misho


in her sport, I feel a lot more responsibility. I thought this is a once in a lifetime opportunity. I will never play another cricketer, and more importantly, there will never be another Mithali.

#### WHAT KIND OF PREPARATION DID YOU DO FOR THE ROLE?

It took almost six months, three months before the second lockdown and three months after, because I'd never played cricket before. Not even as a kid. Most male actors must have played cricket, but that's a rarity with female actors. When they reached out to me, they wanted a commitment from an actor who would give all that it took to play Mithali Raj. I was so excited that I said yes at that time. But while training for it, I was asking myself – why the hell I didn't play cricket when I was younger? Why couldn't I choose to do a normal film? Why did I choose something that's pushing me to my extremes? Then I said to myself that I've got to do it right, otherwise the audience in this cricket-obsessed country like ours will point out and say that this girl, who's playing a cricketer, doesn't even know how to hold a bat properly. In our country, films and cricket are the two religions. Everyone has an opinion on films and cricket. I have to show this audience the first film about a female cricketer in a country where most people don't even know that there is a women's team. I told my director, Srijit Mukherji, "Sir, no matter how much you make me work hard, *aap bas monitor pe dekhna*



**WHEN I CAME HERE NINE YEARS AGO, WHEN CHASHME BADOOR WAS RELEASED, I WAS TOLD THAT YOU HAVE TO LITERALLY WIPE OFF THE FACT THAT YOU ARE FROM THE SOUTH BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL START LOOKING AT YOU LIKE A SOUTH INDIAN ACTRESS**







## **WHAT'LL I GET FROM BEING BITTER? I'LL JUST END UP MAKING MORE ENEMIES THAN FRIENDS.**

**IF I BECOME BITTER, PEOPLE WON'T WANT TO WORK WITH ME.**

**THE RULE OF THE GAME IS THAT YOU HAVE TO ADAPT  
TO IT AND THEN MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH IT**



Top: Zara  
Skirt: Moonray  
Rings: Misho

*ki koi ungli nahi uthana  
chahiye ki ye sahi nahi lag  
raha* (you take care of the  
fact that no one should say  
this isn't right). Just take  
care of that and I'll give it  
all I have." This has been  
the hardest I have worked  
on a film.

### **SACHIN TENDULKAR HAS HYPED THE TRAILER. DOES THAT PUT IN MORE PRESSURE?**

Everyone used to call  
Mithali the 'female Sachin'  
because of the kind of long  
spanning career that she  
had and her legendary  
status. Sourav Ganguly  
launched the trailer, then  
Sachin spoke about it and  
spoke so highly about her.  
Cricket world, *toh bhai  
chashme lagake dekhega*  
picture (then the cricketing  
world is bound to take  
notice). I am mindful of  
that and with all the other  
things which have put me  
under pressure, this is also  
one of them.

### **ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE OUTCOME?**

I am happy, I tried my  
best and I know that.  
After a point, you lose the  
objectivity of your films.  
You can only tell if it's  
good or not so good, and  
I can say that it's a good  
one. It's not a bad film for  
sure. Now, how good is it?  
That is something I have  
never been able to predict  
with my films. I can tell







Top: H&M  
Pants: Mannat Gupta  
Rings: Misho



With Mithali Raj

you one thing, it'll make you weep.

#### HOW DIFFICULT IS IT TO PLAY SOMEONE WHO IS STILL LIVING?

It does become hard in terms of performance. People know about her, especially since 2017 when she has been watched highly. Mithali is totally opposite to my real personality. That was a big challenge for me. I had a very limited range of performance because she is not a person who is too expressive. She's very classic and, by book, speaks very properly and she is a woman of few words. When you see her reaction as she does well during the game, the max you'll get is a big, broad smile. We can't go against the genuine fans who have known her

for a number of years. So we had to walk a thin line between her real, muted personality and what the audience expects out of a sports personality. We have taken liberties in some places where I am allowed to express more than what she usually would in real life. This was obviously after getting permission from her. Otherwise, it gets really hard to show 30 years of a journey in two and a half hours without emotions. You have this image of this very strong-headed captain, someone who comes across as really aggressive, but she is not. She is actually a Bharatanatyam dancer who played cricket. She is very feminine, unlike the image of a sportswoman that you have in your

## MITHALI IS NOT A PERSON WHO IS TOO EXPRESSIVE. SHE'S VERY CLASSIC AND, BY BOOK SPEAKS VERY PROPERLY AND SHE IS A WOMAN OF FEW WORDS

head. She is contrary to everything that we have in mind for a prototype of a leader like Mithali.

#### WAS IT SOMETHING LIKE YOU HAVE TO COPY, LIKE THE WAY SHE WALKS OR...?

Yes, I had to copy the way she walks. I also copied the pace at which she talks, because while I speak very quickly, she talks very

calmly. When I started training for cricket, I was also taught which pad she wears first. I had to learn how she adjusts her helmet, which side she looks at; all of this I had to learn. When she picks up her bat and walks to the pitch, what is her pace? She hardly speaks Hindi; she is a Tamilian who was born and brought up in Hyderabad.



She does not have an accent; it is a very neutral English and Hindi accent. People have hardly seen her speak Hindi because all her interviews are mostly in English. When I talked to her, she said that because she has travelled so much, she has gotten a neutral accent. That is what I got in my performance. Sometimes, when I hit a four and started reacting, Srijit sir was on the mic like, "Very good, but this is not Mithali."

#### HAS HER PERSONALITY INSPIRED YOU IN ANY WAY?

Yes. Firstly, it was when I read her line, "Do you ask a male cricketer who their favourite female cricketer is?" That is what instantly hit me because I used to feel the same thing. Every year since the beginning of my career, from the time I started working in the South, I have answered these kinds of questions about who is my favourite male actor. But I have never heard an actor answer the same question about his female co-stars. So when I heard Mitali's answer, I thought, "Wow, there is a woman at that level who has the guts to say it out loud." And if she has been able to make a mark in spite of going through stuff like this, I can also do it. Another inspiring thing was that just because there's no precedent for something doesn't mean it can't be done.

#### DO YOU FEEL WOMEN ARE FINALLY GETTING THE ROLES THEY DESERVE NOW? DO YOU THINK THIS MOVIE IS GOING TO FURTHER THAT CAUSE?

That, we'll know only after the film's release. But I will give credit where it's



Denim Overcoat: Diksha Khanna | Rings: Misho

**MY AUDIENCE'S TIME AND MONEY SHOULD BE WORTH IT. WHEN I DO A FILM, I OBVIOUSLY WANT THEM TO BE ENTERTAINED, BUT THAT DOES NOT MEAN IT HAS TO BE COMEDY OR ACTION ALL THE TIME. IT CAN BE ANY GENRE, BUT IT HAS TO KEEP THEM GLUED**

due, the situation is better now. Is it equal? No, we are still far away from that, but we are moving in that direction. Many years ago, I was asked this question: where I saw myself in ten years. I used to say, "After five to seven years, I'll move on and do something else." I was told that actresses only have a shelf life of five to seven years. Now it has been almost 12 years since my first film was released and I feel like I am exploring a new level in my career.



YOU ARE CONSIDERED THE TRAILBLAZER FOR CONTENT DRIVEN CINEMA. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS? DO YOU AGREE WHEN PEOPLE TELL YOU THIS?

Recently, one of the new makeup artists was telling me that, "All your films are worth watching, it is just something different in the content." That is something I intentionally try. My audience's time and money should be worth it. When I do a film, I obviously want them to be entertained, but that does not mean it has to be comedy or action all the time. It can be any genre, but it has to keep them glued.

WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED OUT, YOU WERE DOING THAT FLUFFY CINEMA. WAS IT ORGANIC OR WAS IT DELIBERATELY PLANNED?

I did not have a well-thought-out plan when I decided I would go into acting. It took me a lot of bad decisions to understand what is right or wrong for me. I realised that you can do big films, work with big heroes, but at the end of the day, you are not the one the audience is taking back home. I did a lot of big films, which worked and also did not work in the South. I realised that I was a very easily replaceable commodity in films. All



Jacket: Massimo Dutti  
Corset: Zara  
Pants: Two Point Two  
Rings: Misho

ESPECIALLY FOR PEOPLE WHO COME FROM DELHI,  
HE IS A BENCHMARK. FORGET ABOUT BEING AN ACTOR;  
AS HUMAN BEINGS WE FEEL LIKE,

**"YEH KHUSH HAI, TOH WE WILL BE HAPPY." IF  
HE IS IN TROUBLE, I'LL FEEL SAD. SO THAT IS THE  
KIND OF CONNECTION WE HAVE WITH SHAH RUKH**

the other supporting actors and comedians-unki date important hai but heroine ki nahi (their dates are important but not of the heroine). So when I started off in Hindi, I did not want to have that kind of a recall value or that kind of presence where they could easily replace me. I started doing films like *Baby* and *Pink* because



I thought I wouldn't be easily replaced. And now people come to me and say *Shabaash Mithu's* script was written with me in mind. That has definitely changed now.

#### HAS PAY PARITY CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

It has gotten better, but we are still far away from it. The budget of our female-driven film is equivalent to a male actor's salary. That is the difference; it is still there. *Shabaash Mithu* is my biggest budget film so far as a protagonist. But it is still equivalent to...

#### AKSHAY KUMAR'S SALARY?

Akshay Kumar to *bahut zyada hai, niche aa jao thoda* (that's astronomical, come down a peg). So like any other A-lister's salary. It's that big of a difference.

#### HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU NEGOTIATING YOUR FEES?

I do negotiate. Sometimes I have to do it myself and not let my team do it. Some producers, whom I have direct access to and know personally, feel more comfortable talking upfront about the salary, especially when I am the protagonist of the film. So when they come and sit across the



Jacket: Bloni  
Crop top: Zara  
Rings: Misho

**IT TOOK ME A LOT OF BAD DECISIONS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IS RIGHT OR WRONG FOR ME. I REALISED THAT YOU CAN DO BIG FILMS, WORK WITH BIG HEROES, BUT AT THE END OF THE DAY, YOU ARE NOT THE ONE THE AUDIENCE IS TAKING BACK HOME**



table to discuss my salary, I talk about it very clearly, using practical, logical numbers. And I ask them to tell me if I am asking too much. They say no, you are not. But the problem is that when they're making a female-driven film, they strike a hard bargain. Because of the insecurity, the budgeting, and the scale at which you mount a female-driven film is always smaller, they end

up feeling a little hesitant about it. Most of them give me what I ask for because I talk in sensible numbers. Let's base it on how much my films have been making and how much return you will get. I talk on the basis of how much my own films have earned. I am not asking for something bizarre, which is going to put the producer in a situation where there's no scope for return. I make





Denim Overcoat: Diksha Khanna  
Rings: Misho

sure to ask for a sum which he can recover even before the film's release.

**THESE CONCERNS DON'T AFFECT THE MALE STARS. A LOT OF MOVIES ARE NOT WORKING NOW, BUT THEY WILL NEVER EVEN TELL THEM THAT.**

That's exactly the big drop that is going to happen when situations like this happen. Now you see how many films will start getting shelved. Because the insecurity is so high,

**I SAID TO MYSELF THAT I'VE GOT TO DO IT RIGHT, OTHERWISE THE AUDIENCE IN THIS CRICKET-OBSESSED COUNTRY LIKE OURS WILL POINT OUT AND SAY THAT THIS GIRL, WHO'S PLAYING A CRICKETER, DOESN'T EVEN KNOW HOW TO HOLD A BAT PROPERLY**

they will keep getting pushed or shelved.

#### **DON'T YOU EVER FEEL BITTER ABOUT IT?**

What'll I get from being bitter? I'll just end up making more enemies than friends. If I become bitter, people won't want to work with me. The rule of the game is that you have to adapt to it and then make your way through it. It is better to understand how to make your way through smartly.

#### **DUNKI, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

*Dunki* is actually an old term that is being used. It's explained in the movie. I get to work with Rajkumar Hirani and Shah Rukh Khan. A few years back, I didn't even think I'd get a chance like this. I don't want to think about it, but right now this is the best thing that could have happened.

#### **WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE SHOOTING THE FILM?**

We completed one schedule for now. Every day I just have to tell myself to switch off that button in my mind that says, "You are working with Shah Rukh Khan and Rajkumar Hirani." One is a classic, and the other has the heart of our nation. Especially for people who come from Delhi, he is a benchmark. Forget about being an actor; as human beings we feel like, "Yeh khush hai, toh we will be happy." If he is in trouble, I'll feel sad. So that is the kind of connection we have with Shah Rukh. Every day I have to remind myself to not fangirl. When that film was announced, I got so many messages that it



felt like a personal victory. It's just so unexpected for someone like me to get here with no recommendations or support – whatever you may call it. All these personal messages make me feel glad that I made this kind of connection with the audience. That is a very beautiful thing.

**YOU HAVE ALSO BROKEN A MYTH THAT YOU DON'T NEED GODFATHERS TO COME INTO THE INDUSTRY.**

I had no option. No one was taking me as their godchild.

**WHEN YOU LOOK BACK, WAS IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU?**

Back then, I did not see it as a difficulty, I thought this was the only way and that there was no other option. But the satisfaction was worth it. Nobody can look back and take credit for what I have achieved; only I can.

**THESE DAYS, THERE IS A LOT OF TALK ABOUT NORTH OR SOUTH INDIAN CINEMA. YOU HAVE DONE WELL IN BOTH AREAS, SO WHAT IS YOUR TAKE ON THIS?**

When I came to Bollywood nine years ago, when *Chashme Badoor* was released, I was told that you have to literally wipe off the fact that you are from the South because people will start looking at you like a South Indian actress. I was like, “*Yaar maine itni mehnat kari hai vahape*, why is it not looked at as an asset?” I'd done some credible work, and on top of that, I'd worked with some really good and credible names there. I remember on the sets of *Chashme Badoor*, Rishi Kapoor sir asked me once, “So how many films have you done

Top: H&M  
Pants: Mannat Gupta  
Rings: Misho



in the South?” I said 10 and I am working on the 11th one. And by the time *Chashme Badoor* was released, I had 12 South films out. And he was like, “*Arre tu to veteran hai!*” So he was shocked to know that I had done this much work. But because of the blurring of these boundaries now, things are different. Stars from there

**AFTER A POINT, YOU LOSE THE OBJECTIVITY OF YOUR FILMS. YOU CAN ONLY TELL IF IT'S GOOD OR NOT SO GOOD, AND I CAN SAY THAT IT'S A GOOD ONE. IT'S NOT A BAD FILM FOR SURE. NOW, HOW GOOD IS IT? THAT IS SOMETHING I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO PREDICT WITH MY FILMS**





Blazer: Twenty Dresses  
Pants: Zara  
Accessories: Beg Borrow Steal  
Rings: Misho



***I TALK ON THE BASIS OF HOW MUCH MY OWN FILMS HAVE EARNED. I AM NOT ASKING FOR SOMETHING BIZARRE, WHICH IS GOING TO PUT***

**THE PRODUCER IN A SITUATION WHERE THERE'S NO SCOPE FOR RETURN. I MAKE SURE TO ASK FOR A SUM WHICH HE CAN RECOVER EVEN BEFORE THE FILM'S RELEASE**



can now transition as stars here, not like me, who had to transition as a struggler. I am glad those lines have blurred so people won't have to start back from ground zero again.

#### **NOBODY THINKS OF YOU AS A SOUTH STAR THESE DAYS...**

Today, people look at me like I am a pan-India star. Be it brands or films, they are now confident in dubbing them in South languages and releasing them there. Likewise, my South stuff too gets dubbed in Hindi and released.

#### **YOU JUST ATTENDED THE LONDON FILM FESTIVAL WITH *DOBAARAA*. IS IT A SCI-FI FILM?**

There are a lot of genres mixed together because it has also got time travel. Anurag Kashyap has simplified it a lot, so people will understand it. We have made it edible for the Indian audience to understand. It will be the first of its kind in an experimental genre, but it's worth it.

#### **HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK? IT'S BEEN 12 YEARS SINCE YOUR DEBUT...**

It has been more than I expected. For someone who never thought of becoming an actress but is now working in a Shah Rukh Khan film, for someone like that, everything is a bonus. That is why I don't easily get bitter. It is better to be thankful, and to count your blessings. Everyone has an up and down, right? There are days when something doesn't work out well, and then you look back and think, "*Kahan se start kiya tha*, and *kaha aa gaye hai*." (You've come a long way, indeed). ■



# The Maverick

JITESH PILLAAI CHATS WITH **RAJKUMMAR RAO**, WHO TALKS ABOUT HIS SUPPORT SYSTEM AND MORE





Rajkummar Rao is one of the nicest actors you can hope to meet. He's so easygoing and humble that you actually want to tell him to put on some starry airs. The most likeable quality about him is that, despite his success, he's still a student of cinema. Most actors are mostly full of themselves, but he's always generous in his praise of fellow actors and directors. Family is the most important thing for him. He'd rather gift them quality time than shower them with baubles. As an actor, he believes in taking risks, and most of those risks have paid off. Whether it was playing a cad in *LSD*, a concerned journalist in *Aligarh* or a gay cop in his most recent release, *Badhaai Do*, he has completely immersed himself in his character. In this emotional chat, he reveals how important it is for actors, who lead insecure lives, to have a steady support system. He's thankful to have found it at different phases of his life and is grateful to the universe for that.

#### OF ADVICE SHE HAS GIVEN YOU?

The first thing she said was to be honest in my profession, to work hard and be kind to others. My mother was a real fighter, which is why I have this immense respect for women all over the world.

#### IT MUST HAVE BEEN HARD FOR YOU TO COME TO TERMS WITH YOUR MOTHER'S PASSING?

I haven't yet come out of it. Life goes on, and Patralekha is always there. She's the biggest support in my life and has made me a stronger and better person. When mom passed away in 2016, I was shooting for *Newton* in a small town in Chhattisgarh.



DURING MY STRUGGLING DAYS, I WOULD CALL MY MOTHER EVERY TIME I WAS DISAPPOINTED OR FELT LOW. AND I REMEMBER SHE ALWAYS HAD ONE THING TO SAY: "GREAT THINGS ARE GOING TO HAPPEN TO YOU, JUST HOLD ON"



#### WHEN YOU WERE A KID, WHO WOULD YOU TURN TO FOR ADVICE?

My mother was always there. I remember I was in class XI and I liked this girl; she liked me, but she had a boyfriend who was in college. One day, he came with some 30 guys to bash me up. All I kept saying when

they were hitting me was not to hit me in the face, as I wanted to become an actor. I was quite a braveheart. When my brothers came to know about the fight, they got their friends to beat them. I told my mom about the ongoing fights, and she immediately took me to that boy's house. Within

fifteen minutes, we were friends, and he even said to let him know when my film is released. That was my mom. She's no more, and I miss her every day. During my struggling days, I would call her every time I was disappointed or felt low. And I remember she always had one

thing to say: "Great things are going to happen to you, just hold on. Don't worry." Even after my National Award, Filmfare Award or any good thing that happened in my life, she kept saying that this was nothing, greater things would happen to me.

#### WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE

I remember I had given my shot when I saw this guy running towards me, and I was wondering why he was coming into the frame. He came and gave me the phone, and Patralekha broke the news. I tried to be very brave and thought I would go on with my shoot because that's what



my mother would have liked me to do. But I kept sobbing, and it was my friend Anish John who helped me stay together at that time.

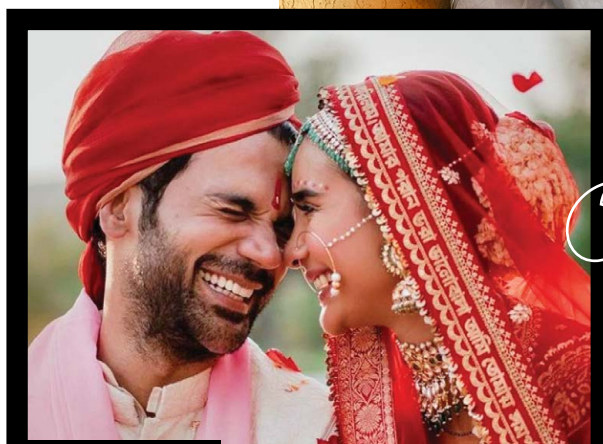
**MANY OF US TURN TO OUR SUPPORT SYSTEM DURING VULNERABLE TIMES. WHO DO YOU TURN TO NOW?**

I turn to God and Patralekha, of course. I am somebody who wants to make people happy, make them laugh. I haven't shared this with anyone, but if I feel low and am sad, I keep it to myself. I do talk to Patralekha, and if it's something enormous, I share it with a couple of close friends and my brothers.

**COMING TO PATRALEKHA. EVERYONE'S CURIOUS TO KNOW HOW THE TWO OF YOU MET AND WHAT THE ROMANCE WAS LIKE. IT'S BEEN ELEVEN YEARS NOW, AND THE ROMANCE IS STILL BEAUTIFUL. HOW DID WE MEET?**

Hmmm... so after *LSD*, I was called back to FTII (Film and Television Institute of India) to shoot a playback song. I got to know that there was a girl called Patralekha who would be acting with me, and we both had to travel together to Pune. This is my side of the story. And

Patralekha's side of the story is, "Oh, this guy who was in *LSD* is coming with me?" She had this impression that I was an asshole and got her sister along. Patra didn't talk to me during the entire journey, but her sister Parnalekha (Parna) got chatty. And then Patra was on the phone with her mom and was whispering something like, "Parna is talking to him; tell her not to talk to him." I tried having a conversation with Patra and asked



With wife Patralekha

her what she had done. When she mentioned a telecom brand, a loud bell rang in my head because I'd seen her in that ad. For some reason, I thought 'what a cute girl! I wish I could marry her...'

**WAS THERE EVER A MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE WHEN YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY CAME TOGETHER**

**FOR A PERSONAL CRISIS? AND HOW DID YOU ALL HOLD IT TOGETHER?**

I didn't have an easy childhood. I became a dance teacher when I was in class eight. I started giving home tuition to one kid, teaching her whatever I knew. I used to feel so happy with the 300 rupees I got as tuition fees every

month. I used to get *ghar ka saman* like ghee for 50 rupees and dal for 25 rupees. I felt proud that I was contributing to the daily needs of my family. They were tough but great times. We are a joint family and really close, and that helps us hold together. I learnt so much from my family and my

brothers (we are four brothers and two sisters).

**DO YOU HAVE A CLOSE GROUP OF FRIENDS OR FRIENDS FROM FTII WITH WHOM YOU ARE STILL IN TOUCH?**

Sunny Hinduja, Pitobash Tripathi, my classmate, Vijay Varma. So many people. And yes, we still keep in touch with each other. I've



LIFE GOES ON, AND PATRALEKHA IS ALWAYS THERE. SHE'S THE BIGGEST SUPPORT IN MY LIFE AND HAS MADE ME A STRONGER AND BETTER PERSON





### CHARACTERS IN YOUR CAREER. DO THEY TAKE A TOLL ON YOU?

Not all the films, but some, like *Shahid*, *Trapped*, *Newton*, *Bose*, had a huge impact on my life. Also, they teach you some things. I feel like I have become a better human being after playing these parts. And then I was working with such amazing filmmakers. But after the making, you have to come out of it and prepare for the next character.

**YOU MENTIONED YOU WERE VERY INSPIRED BY MANOJ BAJPAYEE AS AN ACTOR. SO WHAT WAS IT**

student whenever I meet a senior actor, so I started asking him questions about acting, his process, and films. He's my senior and I have immense regard for him, but whenever we meet now it's like two friends meeting, but I still maintain that respect and dignity. He's very chilled out and I can talk to him about anything.

**HAS IT EVER HAPPENED THAT DURING YOUR STRUGGLING DAYS THEY SAID, "TUM ACTOR NAHI BAN SAKTE" (YOU'LL NEVER BECOME AN ACTOR) AND OTHER KINDS OF INSULTS?** Nobody said, "Actor



I BECAME A DANCE TEACHER WHEN I WAS IN CLASS EIGHT. I STARTED GIVING HOME TUITION TO ONE KID... I USED TO FEEL SO HAPPY WITH THE 300 RUPEES I GOT AS TUITION FEES EVERY MONTH



recently shot with a friend of mine, Jatin Goswami, a brilliant actor and one of my favourite actors from my class. I was so thrilled as I met him after almost a decade and we picked up from where we left off. Nothing had changed.

### TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOUR FTII DAYS?

Everything was amazing. I was very clear about one thing; I wanted to learn as much as I could, because for me, acting is about

practising. The more you practice, the more you grow, and I think my whole journey as an actor shifted from there. One is walking cinema, talking cinema, and reading cinema for those two years. So I really enjoyed that.

### HAVE YOU EVER WATCHED ANY OF YOUR FILMS WITH YOUR PARENTS? WHAT WAS THEIR REACTION?

I haven't watched any films with them, but my brother told me when my first film, *LSD*, was

released, he and my parents, along with some other family members, went to watch it. You know, I have this scene in the climax where I am almost naked. In fact, I had told my mother about this scene ahead of time, and she had said it was fine. But when that scene came, all 12 or 13 of them didn't know what to say. Everyone was feeling awkward and was waiting for the moment to pass.

### YOU HAVE PLAYED SEVERAL COMPLEX

### LIKE WHEN YOU FIRST MET HIM?

When I was growing up, I watched a lot of Hindi films. On one hand, I was watching *DDLJ* and imitating Raj Malhotra (Shah Rukh Khan's character), and on the other hand, I was watching *Shool* and trying to be Samar Pratap Singh (Manoj Bajpayee's character). I met him for the first time when we were shooting for a film called *Chittagong* in 2010, right after *LSD*. I become a

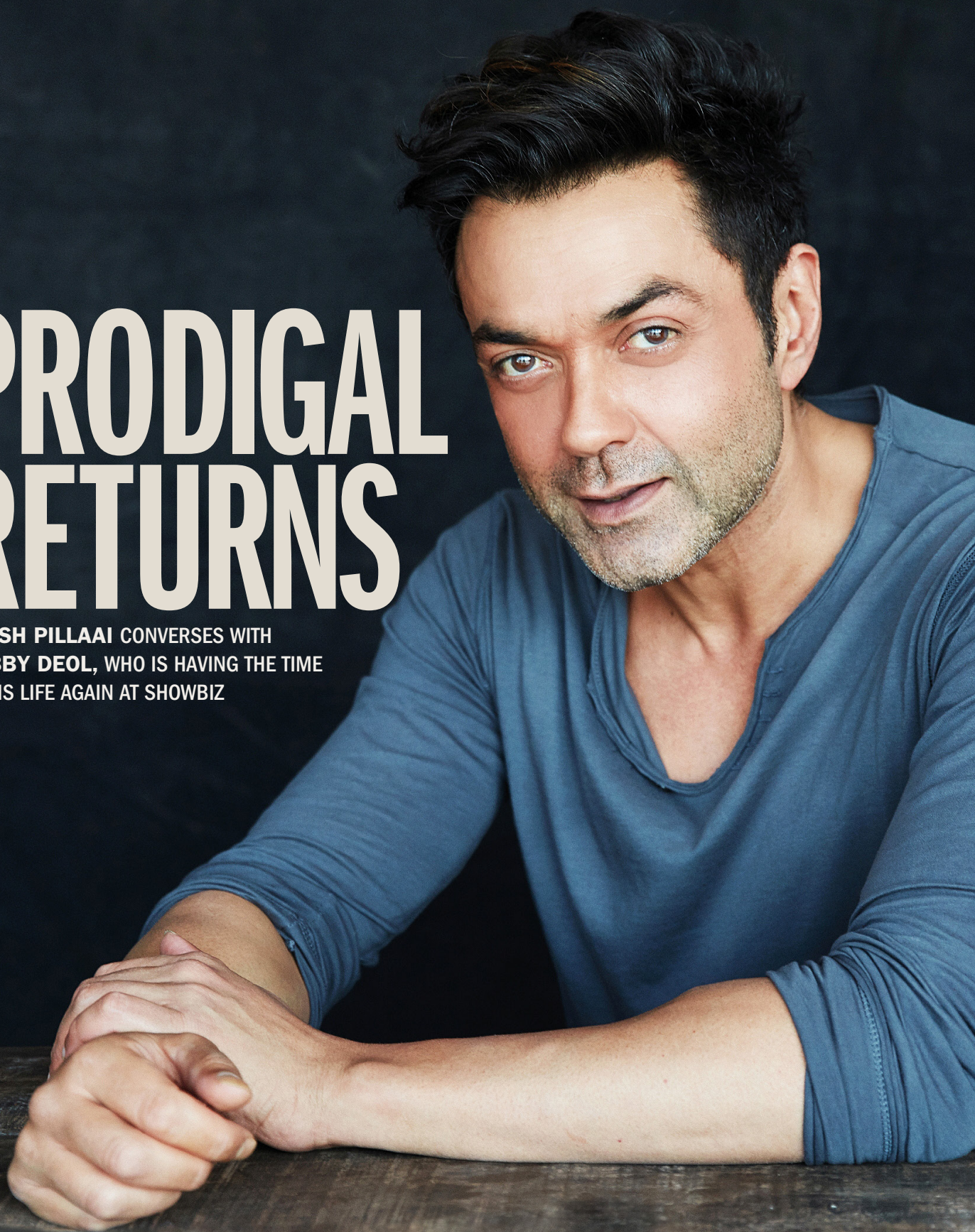
*nahi ban sakoge.*"

In fact, people were helpful, and after an audition they would say "you are good" and things like "be at it, if not for this film, maybe something else." But there were some who asked why I was trying for films and that it was not going to work out. I knew that it was going to be very tough for me. I told myself, "fine, since I'm here, I am going to enjoy the journey." There was no looking back for me. ■



# PRODIGAL RETURNS

JITESH PILLAAI CONVERSES WITH  
**BOBBY DEOL**, WHO IS HAVING THE TIME  
OF HIS LIFE AGAIN AT SHOWBIZ







When *Soldier* got released, all the girls fell in love with him and all the guys wanted to look as cool as him. The back-to-back success of films like *Gupt* (1997), *Soldier* (1998), *Badal* (2000), *Bichhoo* (2000), *Aur Pyaar Ho Gaya* (1997), *Ajnabee* (2001) and *Humraaz* (2002) turned him into a household name. But then, the rising sun met with a roadblock. His films started failing, viewer interaction dwindled and his fans found new faces to worship. Directors who used to court him shied away. He continued doing films, and some, like *Apne* (2007) and *Yamla Pagla Deewana* were commercial successes. But he wasn't considered a serious player in the market. They say luck plays a huge part in bringing you success in this industry. Going against all expectations, Prakash Jha cast him as a rogue Godman in his hard-hitting series *Aashram*. The audience loved him in the negative avatar and he found himself sailing in favourable winds once more. The actor talks about the various ups and downs he's faced, as well as his resurrection, in a warm and candid conversation. Excerpts...

“WHEREVER I GO,  
PEOPLE KEEP  
ASKING ME  
'AASHRAM PHIR  
KAB AA RAHA HAI'.  
SOMETIMES THINGS  
JUST HAPPEN,  
LIKE *GADAR* JUST  
HAPPENED, *SHOLAY*  
JUST HAPPENED,  
AND SIMILARLY,  
AASHRAM JUST  
HAPPENED

**What was it about *Aashram* and the character Baba Nirala, a con man turned godman, that fascinated you?**

I've seen everything in my career—stardom and failure. I was trying to get into a position where people would notice me as an actor, and so wanted to play strong characters. It didn't matter if they were negative or positive, as long as they were well written and had substance. Working with Prakashji (Jha) had always been a dream. I had wanted to work with him for years. I remember meeting him when I was dubbing for *Gupt: The Hidden Truth*.



I bumped into him, and he looked at me and said, "You are a very good-looking boy. We will work together one day." And that one day came after 25 years.

**How did it happen and what was your first reaction?**

One day, I got a call from casting agent Shruti Mahajan saying something interesting had come up. She didn't say anything about the subject except that Prakash Jha was casting and he wanted to see me. I didn't know what to expect, but I was happy that he called. That's when he told me that he was making a web series for MX Player called *Aashram* and narrated the story to me. When he said that he wanted me to play the main character in Kashipur Wale Baba Nirala, I was taken aback for a few seconds. But at the same time, I was very excited because there was a role that was not in my comfort zone. I wanted to challenge myself and see if I had the capability to perform, because people thought I didn't. And God gave me the opportunity. I was so excited I said I was on and didn't even think twice after that.

**And to whom would you give the credit**

**I WAS TRYING TO GET INTO A POSITION WHERE PEOPLE WOULD NOTICE ME AS AN ACTOR, AND SO WANTED TO PLAY STRONG CHARACTERS. IT DIDN'T MATTER IF THEY WERE NEGATIVE OR POSITIVE, AS LONG AS THEY WERE WELL WRITTEN**





### for the success of *Aashram*?

*Aashram* has been created so well, all thanks to Prakashji, who is an awesome director. If he were not the director, I don't think it would have captured all the elements which came out so well in the characters, the characteristics, the dialogues. The cast was awesome: Chandan Roy Sanyal, Tushar Pandey, Darshan Kumar, Aditi Sudhir Pohankar, and so

*saal pehle ek role kiya tha.* That was negative and your *dadi* (grandmother) left the trial room while watching it." He also said, "I am old-fashioned and cannot see you in these roles. But when people call me and praise you, it brings tears to my eyes because I am so happy that you are getting so much love, respect, and appreciation. That's what every father wants for his child."

happening to my father when I was growing up. He was one of the biggest stars ever. Till date, I think he has given the maximum hits. I have seen my dad go through good and bad phases. He was going through a bad phase when *Hukumat* became one of the biggest hits. It's not that my children have grown up on OTT platforms. They like the cinema and love going to the theatres. The OTT platform

time, make a phone call, check your Instagram.

### The content of *Aashram* got into a bit of controversy. When you were reading the script, did you think that with our censorship laws it could get into trouble?

As an actor, I just want to play great characters. After that, what happens or doesn't happen, we don't know. Prakashji is someone who's aware of what's happening

about. They create an issue on social media and grab on to it to be seen and noticed. But it's such a momentary thing because people forget. And after a few days, look out for something new.

### Now you are on season 3. When the first season does well, everyone wants to capitalise on its success.

When people make sequels, whether it's films or series, they are building on the



Class Of '83



Aashram



With director Prakash Jha

**AASHRAM HAS BEEN CREATED SO WELL, ALL THANKS TO PRAKASHJI, WHO IS AN AWESOME DIRECTOR. IF HE WERE NOT THE DIRECTOR, I DON'T THINK IT WOULD HAVE CAPTURED ALL THE ELEMENTS WHICH CAME OUT SO WELL**

many others who have done such a good job. It's the culmination of all the hard work that comes across and makes the show so impressive. It was my lucky day that I got that call.

### What did your dad have to say about *Aashram*? Did he like you in it?

He told me one thing: "Beta maine bahut

### What about your kids? How did they react?

They were very happy. For every child, the father is his idol, and they look up to me. They have seen what I have been through because I am very transparent when it comes to showing emotions. And I am glad they have seen me. I've seen the same thing

has become a way of spending your time when you have nothing better to do. Also, there's so much good stuff coming on it. Sometimes you don't want to go out and watch some web series or films, but when they're available on OTT, you end up watching them. It's so convenient, you can pause it at any

around them in society. He tries to bring out those points which no one else talks about. Why *Aashram* was such a big success is because there are a lot of people who have been through the situations that were shown in that show. I think when you bring all that out, some believe it shouldn't be spoken

success of the first season. They don't know what's going to happen. In web series, it's a little different. The story is elongated and there are many characters that have a story of their own. And the audience knows that now because, thanks to coronavirus, everyone was at home only watching shows on OTT.



Prakashji is someone who does not give in to all this. He's around 68 but his attitude is like a youngster's. He's full of energy, totally focused, totally composed and knows exactly what he wants. And he really works hard. Shooting for the show has been the most exciting time for me. Still, you can not play the same character for many seasons. So you will see a lot of different things in it. You will see some great writing and some great moments. But at the end of the day, we don't know how the audience is going to react to it. When *Aashram* was made, I just wanted people to like the show. I didn't know it would become such a huge success. Wherever I go, people keep asking me '*Aashram phir kab aa raha hai*'. Sometimes things just happen, like *Gadar* just happened, *Sholay* just happened, and similarly, *Aashram* just happened. People overseas have also been watching it. I have never seen such a craze in the USA and UK. People keep calling me, and my mum and dad. I never thought such a negative role would get me such a positive reaction.

**The Class Of '83 was the beginning of your**



**I WANTED TO CHALLENGE MYSELF AND SEE IF I HAD THE CAPABILITY TO PERFORM, BECAUSE PEOPLE THOUGHT I DIDN'T. AND GOD GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY**

**OTT journey. Right?**

Yes. Again, that was a challenging role and out of my comfort zone. An elderly, serious, upright police officer who has a lot of

emotions in him but which are all caged inside. It's difficult to play characters like that, and I was glad that Red Chillies came to me with that project. And then

everything happened so suddenly. *Aashram* was released a week later after the film. A lot of people and critics who saw me in the *Class Of '83* followed

by *Aashram* noticed the variation in characters. And the people who saw *Aashram* first wanted to check me out in the *Class Of '83*. Like I said,





things just happen when they have to.

**This is a completely different medium and you play such drastically different characters. Did you have to hone your skills as an actor?**

Frankly, I surprised myself as an actor. I attended several workshops when I was doing the *Class Of '83*. I used to sit

with these guys for my dialogues and voice modulation and tried to grasp the nuances of the language. You can understand your character, but if you cannot understand your dialogue when you

are speaking, then you can never show the character as you want to. Similarly, during *Aashram*, I was speaking in a language I didn't normally speak: shudh Hindi, with words I didn't understand. But

I sat with a language coach for one and a half months and went through my lines, trying to understand the meaning of every word so that I could feel it as a character. Also, I have seen and experienced so much in life, and these experiences enhanced my performances. When I was younger, I was not mature enough and couldn't get to the depth of my character. Once you get stamped as a star at the beginning of your career, then you gravitate towards movies that are more commercial. You get offered those kinds of films, and sometimes you can go wrong in choosing your movies.

**How do you feel when you look back at your films like *Barsaat*, *Gupt* etc? Do you remember the moments?**

Talking about *Barsaat* I remember when I wanted to wear those

them. I am obsessed and wanted to wear the purple sunglasses because they were really cool. I went up to Santosh Sivan, the cinematographer, and he agreed and asked me to go ahead and wear them. I never realised what a rage they would become. I didn't wear them because I thought they would become a rage, but it happened. I also remember when I was doing the song *Duniya haseeno ka mela* for *Gupt* I was so nervous. In *Barsaat*, I didn't have any dance items of that level. Here the choreographers were Rekha and Chinni Prakashji, and they gave you some really difficult movements. So during the shooting of the song, I used to rehearse non-stop. My jeans and t-shirts would get absolutely drenched with sweat. I bought eight to nine pairs of jeans and kept changing them. But I really

## ONCE YOU GET STAMPED AS A STAR AT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CAREER YOU GRAVITATE TOWARDS MOVIES THAT ARE MORE COMMERCIAL

purple sunglasses and Raj Kumar Santoshi didn't want me to. I have this fetish for sunglasses and perfumes. When I walk into a sunglass or perfume shop, I can be there for hours and keep looking at all of

enjoyed it. I knew it would be something spectacular because of the way Rajiv Rai shot it on this huge canvas. I signed all those films when I started my career and I'm lucky I got to work with these amazing people. ■



# Breaking Barriers

**ONIR** IS AN OPENLY GAY FILMMAKER WHO IS TIRED OF SANITISED LGBTQ NARRATIVES IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA. **TANISHA BHATTACHARYA** RECORDS HIS ANGST

Filmmakers shouldn't limit themselves. Otherwise they run the danger of confirming to set norms. Rather, their aim should be to push the envelope with every film. One filmmaker who believes in extending his boundaries with every outing is Onir. Starting from *My Brother... Nikhil* (2005) to *Shab* (2017), his films have tried to normalise the queer narrative in Hindi cinema. He's an auteur who's equally at ease being an editor or writer as he's being a filmmaker. He's also controversy's favourite child but has never run away from his accusers but has faced them with a rock-like conviction in his beliefs. He's not afraid to show the world who he is and doesn't care for its judgement. Excerpts from a heart-to-heart talk with the maverick filmmaker.

**Indian cinema has progressed quite a bit with how they sensitize queer storytelling now, but you took that plunge back in 2005 with *My Brother Nikhil*.**

Honestly, I don't think I had the problem of courage because I didn't need the courage to be myself. It was perceived as courageous from the outside by the actors and everything because it was the first mainstream film at that time. But while making the film we were doing it solely because everyone loved the script and felt strongly for the story including me. There was more of a need to do it because it moved all of us and we were not conscious we were doing something that we were doing something brave, we were just doing something that we believed would touch people's hearts.



*Kuch Bheege Alfaaz*

***“In a democratic country it is sad that being queer, you cannot serve in the forces. One should be judged according to one's talent, strength, endurance, anything but not sexuality”***

**What are the changes you see in the creative process of filmmaking with so many filmmakers now not hesitating to go for queer characters?**

Honestly speaking, after the 377 verdicts by the supreme court the amount of change that I expected to see, I have not seen that. The number of films





*“Honestly speaking,  
after the 377  
verdicts by the  
supreme court the  
amount of change  
that I expected  
to see, I have not  
seen that”*

---



that have queer content is minimal. Even today, one or two OTT projects have important queer characters. After *Made in Heaven*, there was nothing significant that happened, nothing as impactful. Also while I see a lot of films happening in 2022, the stories are still about acceptance, and grappling with one's own identity and family. I feel that for me as an out and proud queer filmmaker and person, I have done it 17 years ago. Even then for me, it was very important that my character Nikhil walks out of his house when

they don't accept him. He is not someone who is begging for acceptance. He tells his mother that he'll only come back when his dad wants to take him back home which means acceptance is not what he is begging for, he demands acceptance. Whereas today even after so many years I see films revolving around begging for acceptance.

**Isn't acceptance necessary...**

I feel like the narrative has to move beyond acceptance because our life is not just confined to acceptance by the

heteronormative world. Whether that world accepts me or not I am living a full life and someone should start telling those stories instead of always dying for acceptance. For me, if a family does not accept me, and I tell this to every queer person because a large number of youngsters message me. I tell them to focus on their career, the day they are independent they can come out to their family if they want and if they don't accept, walk out. Walk out from this overhyped notion of family, if they can't love you for who you are, they never loved you. So then you create your own family...

**Go on...**

I find it a little problematic when all our films now are all about how we can fit into the hetero normative society. The makers of these films are mostly straight and say they're taking baby steps. Why is the desire being taken away from gay narratives? Who does it make uncomfortable? Secondly, no one had to teach me how to accept the straight world, I did not have to take any baby steps. Just because you guys are taking baby steps does not mean I am still stuck in that space and still having to see those

stories of baby steps. When I see films like *Call Me By Your Name* and *Moonshine*, they are also about coming out but they are much beyond that. They touch you and very often when I watch films made here, I feel I can't relate to them. Where men and women hardly touch each other or kiss each other with passion. You feel who are these people behaving like monks. Some of them are of course addressing the larger audience but it has to move beyond that so that people realise that my life is not about other people accepting me or not.

**My Brother... Nikhil, I am... or Shab - you worked on these when homosexuality was yet to be decriminalized, did you feel a certain pressure of what the outcome would be like?**

In *My Brother Nikhil*, I did not feel the need to include physical intimacy. For me, it was important to talk about love and I feel that there is so much tenderness in the way the character of Purab looks at the character of Sanjay. The look is not sanitised, the look is of sensuality and love. When I was doing I am, it was important to show a certain amount of physicality because it was about being

***"I feel like the narrative has to move beyond acceptance because our life is not just confined to acceptance by the heteronormative world"***







My Brother... Nikhil

denied that right. In *Shab*, I had various gay characters living their life facing different kinds of challenges and there you see the desire in a different manner. Right now I have just finished the shooting for my next film *Pine Cone* and I can tell that, might sound a little arrogant, I know that no Indian film would have explored queer desire without shame the way I have explored in *Pine Cone*. The narrative is not about baby steps, it is about celebrating our stories without filters.

**Your film *We Are* is inspired by the true story of Major J. Suresh who was a gay army man, and that got rejected by the Ministry of Defence, what was your initial reaction to that?**

I was angry actually because this is inspired by a true story that was in the public domain. It was not a fictitious thing that I made up, it was an army man who



I Am

***“When I watch films made here, I feel I can’t relate to them. Where men and women hardly touch each other or kiss each other with passion”***

had given interviews to the media in the public domain. I thought that when the supreme court decriminalized homosexuality, the judge proclaimed that society needs to apologize to the queer community. And for me, that was touching and that meant that every state agency would take

steps to implement the essence of the verdict which is about us being treated as equals. In a democratic country it is sad that being queer, you cannot serve in the forces. One should be judged according to one's talent, strength, endurance, anything but not sexuality. Why is someone who is

heterosexual supposed to be more apt? How come it is only the queer community that is punished for no reason? This is a violation of our human rights and democratic rights. This was really upsetting but I will find a way soon.

**This happening after decriminalizing section 377 in 2018 - what do you have to say on CBFC's take on stories revolving around queer individuals or just sexual orientation for that matter?**

My personal experience is that we are going backward. In 2005 when I made *My Brother Nikhil*, I got a U certificate without any single cut. In 2011 it started with the CBFC board wanting 21 minutes of the film edited out. I fought for six months and finally agreed to cut three minutes of the film, which still hurt me. But we finally got an A certificate and two National Awards. In 2017 I had to hear from the film certification board “Acha! Aapne toh in logon ko normal dikha diya.” That came from a film certification board and it took me nearly a year to get a U/A certificate so that the film could go on. I had to hear ridiculous comments like “Aap inko bhai jaise nahi dikha sakte?” In 2022, even before I can make a film, I don't get a NOC to shoot. Now that we are decriminalised, I can't even make the film I want to. It is kind of an irony, of course, there are things in which we are more empowered, but there are different manners in which our voices are being choked. ■



# FAREWELL, TARUN MAJUMDAR

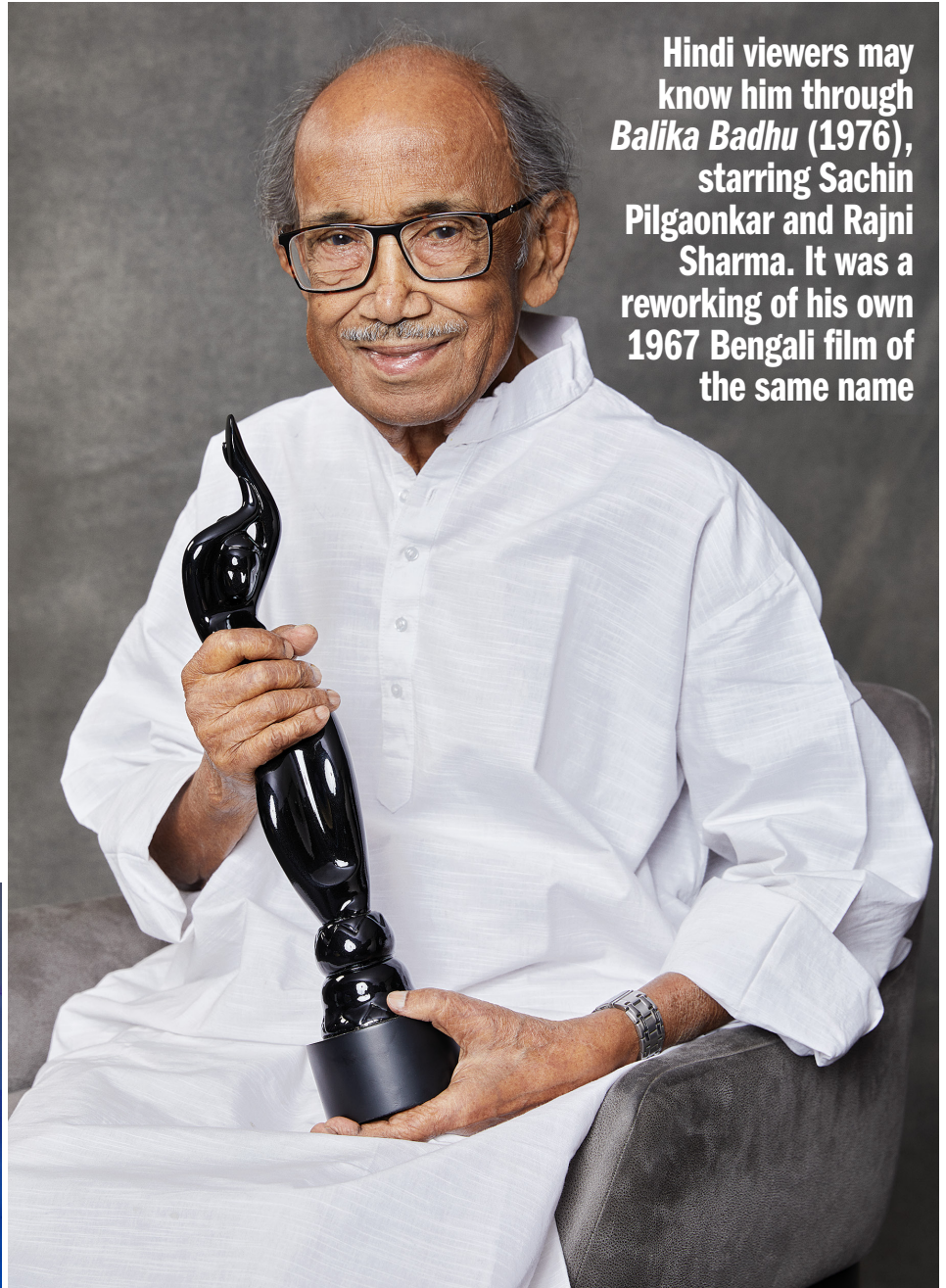
DEVESH SHARMA OFFERS A SHORT PROFILE OF THE PROLIFIC BENGALI FILMMAKER WHO PASSED AWAY RECENTLY

(JANUARY 8, 1931–JULY 4, 2022)

**N**oted Bengali filmmaker Tarun Majumdar was born on January 8, 1931 in Bogra, which now falls in Bangladesh. His father, Birendranath Majumdar, was a freedom fighter. He studied at Scottish Church College, affiliated to the University of Calcutta.

Hindi viewers may know him through *Balika Badhu* (1976), starring Sachin Pilgaonkar and Rajni Sharma. It was a reworking of his own 1967 Bengali film of the same name, starring Moushumi Chatterjee. His early films were credited to Yatrik, which was the screen name of the trio of directors Tarun Majumdar, Sachin Mukherji, and Dilip Mukherji until 1963, after which each began to be credited separately. As Yatrik, their first venture

Hindi viewers may know him through *Balika Badhu* (1976), starring Sachin Pilgaonkar and Rajni Sharma. It was a reworking of his own 1967 Bengali film of the same name







Srijit Mukherji, Kaushik Ganguly, Indraadip Dasgupta and Arindam Sil seen here handing over the Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award trophy to Tarun Majumdar

was *Chaowa Paowa* (1959), starring Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen.

In 1965, he made two films: *Ektuku Basha* with Soumitra Chatterjee and *Alor Pipasha* with Basanta Choudhury. The films featured Sandhya Roy, a popular actress whom he married, but the couple later separated. After that, he never looked back and was known for his plethora of commercially successful films. He has worked with everyone from Uttam Kumar, Suchitra Sen, Soumitra Chatterjee, and Sandhya Roy to Tapas Paul, Prosenjit Chatterjee, Debashree Roy, and Rituparna Sengupta. Sandhya Roy starred in twenty of his films and Tapas Paul in eight. He's credited with introducing Moushumi Chatterjee, Mahua Roychoudhury, Ayan Banerjee, and Tapas Paul to the silver screen.

The filmmaker, who had helped shape the careers of so many stalwarts of Bengali cinema, was the recipient of our Lifetime



Achievement Award in 2021. He was held in high regard by the Bengali film industry, as evidenced by the fact that the entire audience rose as one to pay their respects when his name was announced.

He had also won the Filmfare Award earlier for films like *Balika Badhu*, *Nimantran* (1971), *Sansar Simante* (1975) and *Ganadevta* (1978). He'd also been the recipient of various National Awards, like the Best Feature Film in Bengali for *Kancher Swargo* (1962) and *Nimantran*, Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment for *Ganadevta*, and the National Film Award for

Best Scientific Film for *Aranya Aamar* (1984). He was also the recipient of the Padma Shri in 1990.

Music was an integral part of his brand of cinema. His usage of Rabindra Sangeet has long been admired. Though he was more of a massy filmmaker than other Bengali stalwarts like Satyajit Ray, Mrinal Sen, and Ritwik Ghatak, his place in the pantheon of Bengali greats remains cemented. Another reason his films were so popular at the time of their release and are still considered timeless is that he used to research the works of literary figures such as Tarasankar

## Tarun Majumdar is credited with introducing Moushumi Chatterjee, Mahua Roychoudhury, Ayan Banerjee, and Tapas Paul to the silver screen

Bandyopadhyay, Subodh Ghosh, Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, and Bimal Kar for his stories.

His other notable films include *Palatak* (1963), *Kuheli* (1971), *Sriman Prithviraj* (1973), *Thagini* (1974), *Fuleswari* (1974), *Dadar Kirti* (1980), *Bhalobasha Bhalobasha* (1985), *Apan Amar Apan* (1990), *Alo* (2003), and *Chander Bari* (2007). His career spanned six decades. Despite his advanced age, he was active until 2018. His last released feature film was *Bhalobashar Bari*, which came out that year and starred Silajit and Rituparna Sengupta. He also worked on a documentary called *Adhikaar* in the same year. The film spoke about the struggles of the people working in the unorganised sector.

He has been undergoing treatment at the state-run SSKM hospital since June 14. Majumdar was put on ventilator support on July 3, when his health deteriorated and he breathed his last at 11.17 am on July 4. He was 91 at the time of his death. He may have left us for his heavenly abode, but he will forever be alive in the hearts of his fans through his films. ■



# THE *Thespian*

**Devesh Sharma** lists the top movies starring **Naseeruddin Shah** in the lead role

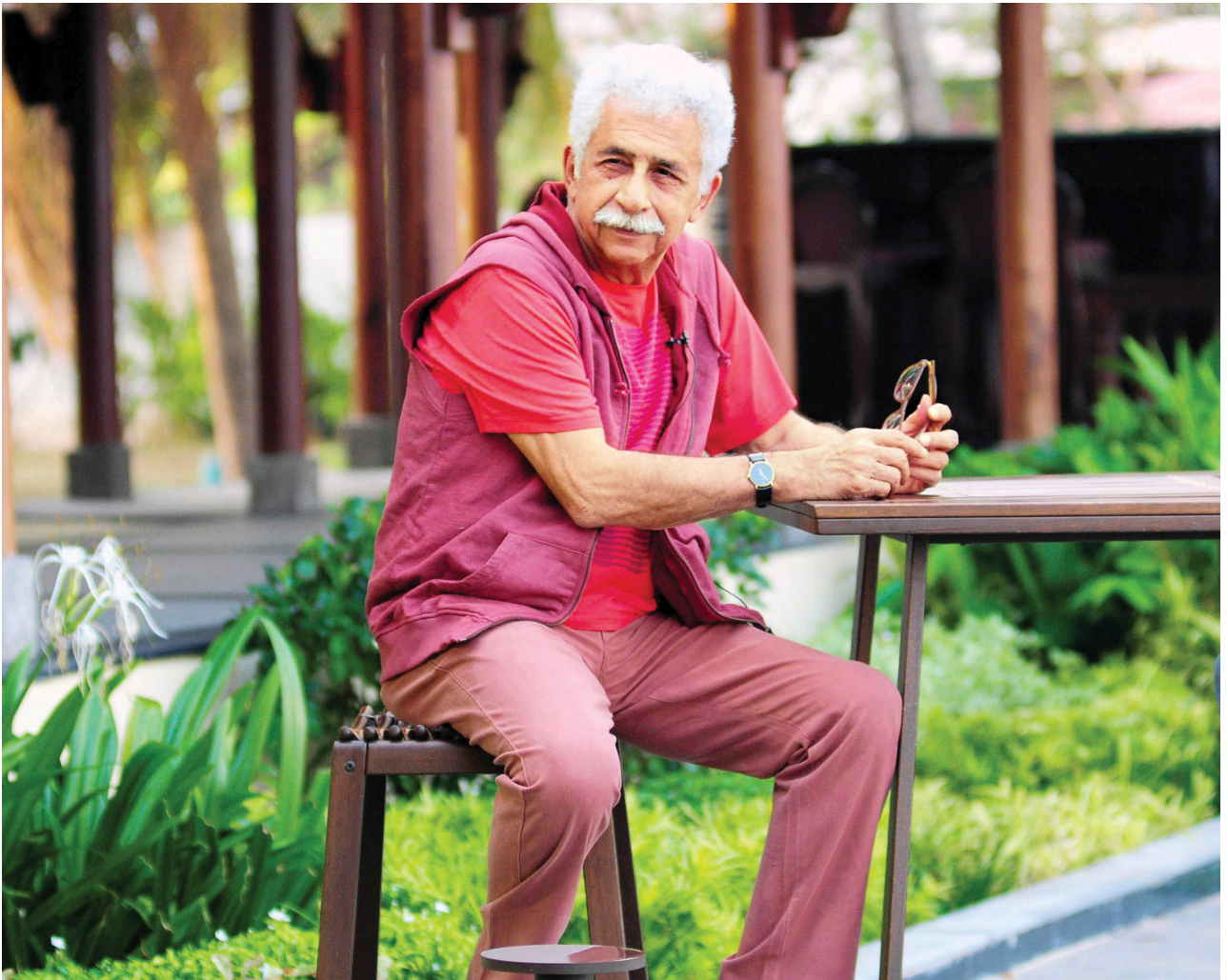


IMAGE COURTESY: COMYAN

**NASEERUDDIN SHAH** is one of those actors whom you'd still watch even if they're doing nothing more than standing against a wall, because there's poetry even in that stillness. In the late '70s and early '80s, he, along with friend and rival Om Puri, was the most sought after actor for makers of art films. From the late '80s onward, he began to get starring roles in commercial films too, and soon got a fan following among the masses as well. He became Mr. Dependable to a range of directors, from Shyam Benegal to Subhash Ghai. Be it drama, comedy, or even action, he made his mark in every genre, giving something new to the audience with every role. Such is his virtuosity that he could pass off being a Parsee, a Maharashtrian, a Goan, or even a South Indian with aplomb, bringing the correct nuances to his dialogue delivery in the process. He could play everything from a bonded labourer to a doctor, a cop, and even a singer with equal finesse. He turns 72 on July 20 and we celebrate his birthday by profiling 10 of his early films where he showcases his versatility...





## SPARSH (1980)

**DIRECTOR:** SAI PARANJPYE | **CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, SHABANA AZMI, SUDHA CHOPRA, OM PURI

People who rave about Al Pacino's performance as a blind man in *Scent Of A Woman* (1992) should go and check out Naseeruddin Shah's performance in *Sparsh* (1980). Rumour has it that Pacino himself watched the film a number of times to get a hang on how to convincingly play a blind character. The film revolves around a romance between a visually impaired principal, Anirudh (Naseeruddin Shah), and a sighted teacher, Kavita

(Shabana Azmi), in a school for the blind. Anirudh and Kavita both have suffered much in life and find each other to be kindred souls. They get romantically involved, until petty jealousies and insecurities threaten to mar their relationship. Naseer said much through body language and brought out the pain and angst of a blind person through his superlative performance. He won the National Award for his efforts.

## OTHER gems

EVERYTHING NASEERUDDIN SHAH HAS DONE IS PURE GOLD. HERE ARE SOME OF OUR OTHER FAVOURITES



### CHAKRA (1981)

Naseer plays a petty crook in the film who becomes disenchanted with a life of crime after getting plagued by disease and drugs. He resigns himself to the fact that there's no way out and gives in to the cycle of events repeating themselves. He won the Filmfare Best Actor Award for his role.

## AAKROSH (1980)

**DIRECTOR:** GOVIND NIHALANI  
**CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, SMITA PATIL, AMRISH PURI, OM PURI



Naseeruddin Shah plays a hotshot young lawyer out to get justice for a tribal man falsely accused of killing his wife. The only problem is that the man refuses to talk. The mute suffering of Bhiku Lahanya (Om Puri) goads advocate Bhaskar Kulkarni (Naseeruddin Shah) into taking greater risks in the pursuit of justice. He's advised by his mentor and courtroom rival, public prosecutor Dusane (Amrish Puri), to go easy, but the veteran's advice goes unheeded. He even faces death threats while he's investigating, but that doesn't deter him. He's frustrated that Bhiku has kept mum throughout, but at the end, everyone is in for a shock as Bhiku murders his own sister as a means for her to escape the same fate as his wife. He screams and screams, throwing his pent-up angst back at the universe. Naseer won the Filmfare Best Actor trophy for his sublime portrayal.



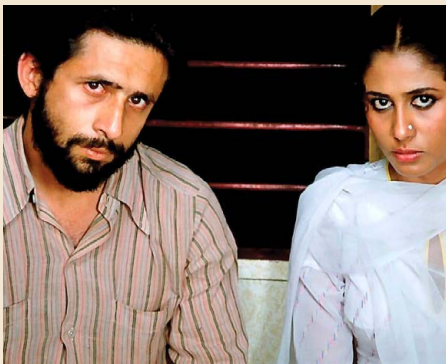
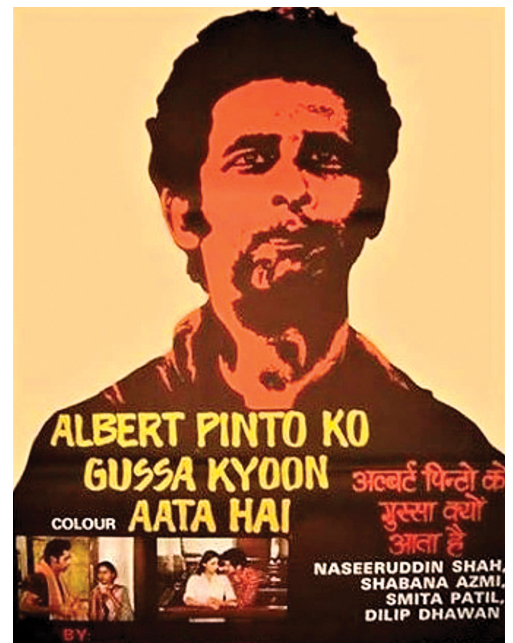
# ALBERT PINTO KO GUSSA KYOON AATA HAI (1980)

**DIRECTOR:** SAEED AKHTAR MIRZA | **CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, SHABANA AZMI, SMITA PATIL, OM PURI

The film was a social satire of sorts. Naseeruddin Shah played a naive car mechanic named Albert Pinto, who's content tinkering with the cars of his rich clients and is happy when he gets praised for his work. When he hears about workers striking for basic rights, he

becomes enraged, believing that they should just keep quiet and follow the rules, and that their hard work will make them rich one day. This changes when his father (Arvind Deshpande), is beaten by goons when he joins a strike and his brother Dominic

(Dilip Dhawan) is caught by the police and thrown in jail as he was caught stealing food because he had no money. Albert realises that workers have a genuine cause to strike and starts getting angry at the capitalists rather than the working class.



## BAZAAR (1982)

**DIRECTOR:** SAGAR SARHADI | **CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, FAROOQ SHAIKH, SMITA PATIL

The film was an eye-opener about the nefarious practise of getting young girls married to old, rich men from the Gulf region. Naseer plays a poet named Salim in the film and is the voice of reason. He's helpless to stop what's happening but is saddened and deluded by it all. He goes on a drunken rage against the practise and equates it to slavery. While he can't change the system, he can offer the hope of a new life to Najma (Smita Patil), the woman he has loved secretly for the last six years. In the midst of the otherwise bleak landscape of the film, this unsaid promise offers a ray of sunshine.



### PESTONJEE (1988)

In this comedy-drama about the Parsi community, Naseer was praised for playing a Parsi character to perfection. His introverted character played the perfect foil to Anupam Kher's extroverted character.



### DROHKAAL (1994)

Naseer's DCP Abbas Lodhi was one of the highlights of this gritty film. The film depicted the crusade of two police officers against terrorists. Your heart goes out to both Naseer and Om Puri seeing their dedication.



## MASOOM (1983)

**DIRECTOR:** SHEKHAR KAPUR  
**CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, SHABANA AZMI, JUGAL HANSRAJ, URMILA MATONDKAR

It is an adaptation of the novel *Man, Woman and Child* (1980) by Erich Segal. Naseeruddin Shah moved away from playing rural or marginalised characters and played an urban upper class man and looked like someone who belonged to that milieu. DK (Naseerudin Shah) is happily married to Indu (Shabana Azmi). The couple have two adoring daughters, Pinky (Urmila Matondkar) and Minni (Aradhana Srivastav). DK comes to know that his affair with Bhavana (Supriya Pathak) has resulted in her getting a child, Rahul (Jugal Hansraj), through him. After her death, he brings the child home. The father's identity isn't revealed to the child. While the daughters take to him, Indu simmers with resentment. DK has conflicted emotions about his son. For the sake of his family, he wants to send him to a boarding school. In the end, Indu relents and Rahul gets assimilated into the family.





## KATHA (1983)

**DIRECTOR:** SAI PARANJPYE | **CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, FAROOQ SHAIKH, DEEPTI NAVAL

The film is based on S.G. Sathy's Marathi play *Sasa Aani Kasav* (Hare and Tortoise), which itself is a modern interpretation of the folktale *The Hare and the Tortoise*. Naseeruddin Shah vastly underplayed his role here, granting a better share of limelight to Farooq Shaikh. And why not? Because he plays the proverbial tortoise in the film. Rajaram Joshi (Naseeruddin Shah) is an introverted clerk living in a chawl in Mumbai.

He secretly loves Sandhya (Deepti Naval), one of his neighbours. His friend Bashu Bhatt (Farooq Shaikh) arrives one day and settles in. His tall tales and exuberant nature soon made him popular in the chawl. He manages to impress both Rajaram's employer and the girl he loves. The tortoise finds himself losing everything he cared for by a mile. But there's redemption for him at the end, as his empathy helps tide things over.



## MONSOON WEDDING (2001)

The actor plays the patriarch of the Verma family who is caught up in his daughter's wedding. He stands up for his niece when he comes to know that she'd been abused as a child by another relative. His firm stance won the heart of the audience.



## PAAR (1984)

**DIRECTOR:** GOUTAM GHOSE | **CAST:** SHABANA AZMI, NASEERUDDIN SHAH, OM PURI, UTPAL DUTT

Imagine a sea of pigs. Now imagine two actors trying to herd them across a flooded river. *Paar* might have been a realistic take on the life of the poorest of the poor, but it has a huge thriller vibe as well. You have your heart in your throat as you watch a pregnant Shabana Azmi and Naseeruddin Shah battle the waves and try to hold it all together as the elements threaten to engulf them. The film highlighted the fact that the *zamindars* still held sway over the rural economy even after so many years of Independence. That the life of low caste labourers was less valuable than that of the pigs they were herding. The way both Shabana and Naseer give in to their roles and literally live the lives of labourers is both heartbreaking and uplifting at the same time.





## IJAAZAT (1987)

**DIRECTOR:** GULZAR | **CAST:** REKHA, NASEERUDDIN SHAH, ANURADHA PATEL

It's based on a Bengali story, *Jatugriha* by Subodh Ghosh, which was later adapted into a 1964 Bengali film starring Uttam Kumar. Gulzar's version, while it kept to the main strands of the story, was different in treatment from the original film. It focused on the dynamics of modern marriage and how a lack of proper communication can sometimes jeopardise a vibrant relationship. Also, the heart is a polyamorous being, and should it be shackled into a monotonous relationship? Mahendra (Naseeruddin Shah) gets to meet

his ex-wife, Sudha (Rekha), in the waiting room of a station after many years. They had a happy marriage, but Mahendra could never fully let go of his sweetheart Maya (Anuradha Patel). This leads to altercations between them. Mahendra has his reasons for caring for her, which he hasn't been able to communicate to his wife. One day, she decides to leave him, and he realises his loss only after the incident. The film had poignant portrayals by Rekha, Naseer, and Anuradha Patel. The scenes between Rekha and Naseer in particular offered a masterclass in acting.



### A WEDNESDAY! (2008)

Naseer plays an unnamed common man who holds a city to ransom until his demands have been met. His cat and mouse game versus Anupam Kher, who played the police commissioner, was the highlight of the film.



## JALWA (1987)

**DIRECTOR:** PANKAJ PARASHAR  
**CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, ARCHANA PURAN SINGH, SAEED JAFFERY, JOHNNY LEVER

Move over, Bruce Willis. Naseeruddin Shah played the badass lone cop a year before *Die Hard* was released. It was his foray into being a full-fledged action hero. And being the method hero that he is, he built up a fab body and really had a ball showcasing his muscles and beating up the bad guys. It was a full-fledged revenge thriller where he took on the goons single-handedly in Goa and also romanced Archana Puran Singh with gusto. The film is surely ripe for a remake. Maybe Rohit Shetty should look it up again.

## HERO HIRALAL (1988)

**DIRECTOR:** KETAN MEHTA | **CAST:** NASEERUDDIN SHAH, SANJANA KAPOOR, DEEPA SAHI, KIRAN KUMAR



The film was a spoof of sorts, of escapist Bollywood fare. Naseeruddin Shah plays a Hyderabad

rickshaw driver called Hiralal, who falls in love with a young starlet named Roopa (Sanjana Kapoor). She too

reciprocates his feelings, but her family members come in their way. She's told to concentrate on her career and forget about him. A heartbroken Hiralal signs up for a deal with Rani Sitara Devi (Deepa Sahi), who promises to make him famous by arranging for him to die on stage. It was a cornball satire which made fun of Bollywood tropes, and Naseer sure had lots of fun essaying his role.



# your say

reader's reviews, box-office, celebrity column & more

## INSTA LIKE

### Medley of moments

Check out the best Instagram posts of the stars from recent times



@aliaabhatt: Our baby..... coming soon 🥰❤️👶  
*The internet went into a meltdown when Alia Bhatt posted this photo of herself getting an ultrasound exam. She and Ranbir are going to be parents, and we wish the couple tonnes of happiness towards that.*

@anilskapoor:  
Outfit that  
Up-Lifts the  
mood!  
*If the box  
office numbers  
of JugJugg  
Jeeyo are an  
indication,  
Anil Kapoor  
sure knows  
how to 'lift' up  
a film for sure.*



@arjunkapoor:  
Eiffel good...  
I knew I would...  
*Arjun Kapoor and  
Malaika Arora  
never fail to give  
us couple goals.  
These vacation  
pics from Paris  
are proof they're  
made for each  
other.*

@priyankachopra:  
Happiest birthday Mama.  
May you always smile that  
infectious smile of yours.  
You inspire me so much  
with your zest for life and  
experiences every single  
day! Your solo Europe tour  
was the best birthday  
celebration I've seen in  
a while. Love you to the  
moon and back Nani.

*Priyanka Chopra's mother,  
Madhu Chopra, finally met  
her granddaughter Malti  
Marie, and her beaming smile said it all. The joy  
captured in the picture is palpable.*



@kiaraaliaadvani:  
Dropping something  
special at 10 am  
tomorrow  
*JugJugg Jeeyo couple  
Varun Dhawan and Kiara  
Advani sure know how to  
drop expressions. They  
make even stills look so  
vibrant. We wonder what  
secrets they're sharing.*

Readers send in their feedback pg 56

Shatrughan Sinha's racy rejoinders pg 58





# IN THE MAIL

READERS WRITE AND BITE BACK... WITH LOVE AND AFFECTION

**1<sup>st</sup> Prize**  
**₹1500**

## WOMEN ARE ON TOP

It's the era of the ladies. The piece on contemporary actresses turning into entrepreneurs was wonderful. I enjoyed reading about all the A-listers. It's good to see changing times where actresses get to venture into so many other fields.

Garima Chaudhary, Kolkata



Multitasking goddesses

## BOSS LADY VIBES

I loved the piece on all my favourite actresses who've gained success as entrepreneurs too in your last issue (June). It's wonderful to see women succeeding, and there's such a diverse range of accomplishments. *Filmfare* should do such in-depth stories more often.

Sneha Joshi, Surat

## GIRLS RUN THE WORLD

The piece on contemporary actresses earning names in the world of startups in your last issue (June) was so good to read. I am a huge Priyanka Chopra fan, and I wasn't aware that she has so many offerings as an entrepreneur. She truly is the ultimate star and my favourite. I admire her all the more now.

Radha Rangaswamy, Chennai

**2<sup>nd</sup> Prize**  
**₹1000**

## FASHION'S PRINCE

It was so amazing to read about Manish Malhotra's journey in the world of cinema and fashion in your last issue (June). He's achieved so much purely on the amazing talent that he has. I love his sequin designs. He makes ethnic fashion look absolutely regal.

Rupali Jadhav, Pune



Fashion guru: Manish Malhotra

## FASHION FIRST

As a fashion student, anything about the rise and rise of Manish Malhotra is so interesting and helpful to know. I loved his interview in your latest issue (June). He's truly a talented gem. Thanks for the insightful read, *Filmfare*.

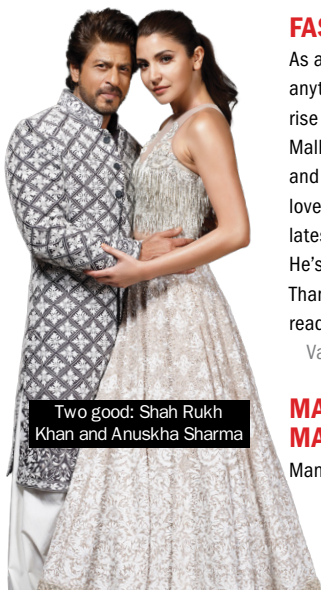
Vaibhav Gupta, New Delhi

## MAESTRO MANISH MALHOTRA

Manish Malhotra's

designs set the industry standard. Bollywood buffs have always been charmed by his dreamy designs, and I am no different. It's marvellous how he's equally talented with both menswear and womenswear. He's my favourite. His interview in your last issue (June) made my day. Thanks to *Filmfare* for featuring my favourite designer.

Rohan Rai, Bareilly

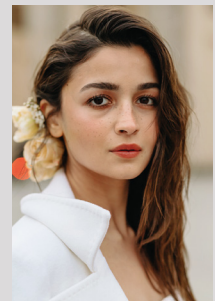


Two good: Shah Rukh Khan and Anushka Sharma

## WONDERFUL ALIA

Alia Bhatt is unstoppable. I love all her films, and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* was absolutely stunning. Her interview in your last issue (June) was mesmerising indeed. She sure has got a cool head on her shoulders for sure.

Jamshed Deboo, Mumbai



Best of the best: Alia Bhatt

## RISE AND RISE

Alia Bhatt is on a roll, and she deserves every bit of her superstardom. I was so impressed with her amazing performance in *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. Sanjay Leela Bhansali sure brought out the best in her for sure.

Sanjay Kulkarni, Akola

## YOUNG, BOLD, BEAUTIFUL

I am constantly fascinated by how far Alia can reach as an artist. Her interview in your last issue (June) sounded so professional and insightful. It truly made me feel that no one could have played the title role in *Gangubai Kathiawadi* as well as she did. She will always be my favourite.

Aman Jain, Gandhinagar





Wonderful actor:  
Nawazuddin Siddiqui

### MAVERICK STAR

Nawazuddin Siddiqui is what we call an unconventional star. He's done such versatile roles that have only gone on to prove his mettle as a gifted artist. The interview in the issue revealed so many things about him that I did not know. There's just so much you get to know through such candid interviews. Thanks, *Filmfare*, for always making it a great read!

Sneha Rawat, Dehradun

### FABULOUS ACTOR

Nawazuddin Siddiqui is a shining example of how hard work can lead to success. I've liked him in everything he has done so far. I liked how candid he was in the interview with *Filmfare* in your last issue (June). A treat for his fans, for sure.

Abhijit Sahu, Rourkela



Gorgeous: Samantha

### SOUTH SIREN

Samantha is just fabulous. I am so enamoured by her screen presence. She's my absolute favourite. I just loved the in-depth tete-e-tete conversation in your last issue (June). So much more to know about her craft and her journey. Trust *Filmfare* to always keep it interesting for a film buff.

Barry Lewis, Panjim

### TOP CLASS

Samantha is what they call beauty with brains. So confident and elegant at all times. I can't wait for her upcoming projects. I would love to see her venturing into Bollywood considering her fandom.

Charu Ghosh, Bangalore

### FAREWELL, KK

KK's passing away was a huge blow. It is so good to see such a nice tribute given to him in *Filmfare* in your last issue (June). He was indeed one of the greatest singers ever. It was heartening to read more about him one last time.

Madhurima Datta, Bhubaneswar



New talent: Namrata Sheth

### SLOW AND STEADY

Namrata Sheth has been a real raw talent to watch out for post *Guilty Minds*. The series was an absolute edge-of-the-seat thriller. I loved her performance and character arc in it. I have seen her in other shows too but *Guilty Minds* was definitely it. I loved reading about her journey and the limelight she's currently in your last issue (June).

Rinki Sharma, Mumbai

### GUILTY PLEASURE

*Guilty Minds* was one of the best courtroom dramas I have watched in recent times. The entire cast did a great job, and Namarata Sheth truly owned the screen with this opportunity. It's good to see young talents soaring.

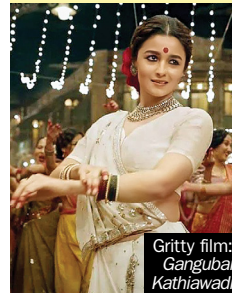
Jibran Sethi, Delhi

### MASTER STORYTELLER

I've been reading *Filmfare* for aeons, and it's so good to see how they continue to have such nice write-ups on legends. I loved the piece on Subhash Ghai. A few of my most loved Hindi films are by him, and he takes you to another world with his direction.

Kaushik Reddy, Udupi

## Just one Point



Gritty film:  
*Gangubai Kathiawadi*

Alia Bhatt is the superstar we've been waiting for in recent times, and there's just no one like her. It was so good to read something fresh about her post-wedding in your last issue (June).

Raunak Jadeja, Rohtak

Manish Malhotra speaking about all things fashion? What's not to like? *Filmfare* always lives up to my expectations.

Jyoti Singhla, Rewari

KK was, is, and shall always be one of the best singers Bollywood has ever had. Who can forget his soulful voice in *Khuda jaane* and *Aankhon mein teri?*

Kiran Godbole, Pune

The more I read about Alia, the more I feel inspired by her. I enjoyed reading about her and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* in your last issue (June).

Paul D'Souza, Bangalore

**NEW KID ON THE BLOCK**

Anya Singh is such a great talent. I have been watching her OTT shows on repeat. I was pleasantly surprised to see her featured in your last issue (June). It's great to see new talents being noticed and acknowledged. Keep up the good work.

Maitrayee Mukerjee,  
Kolkata

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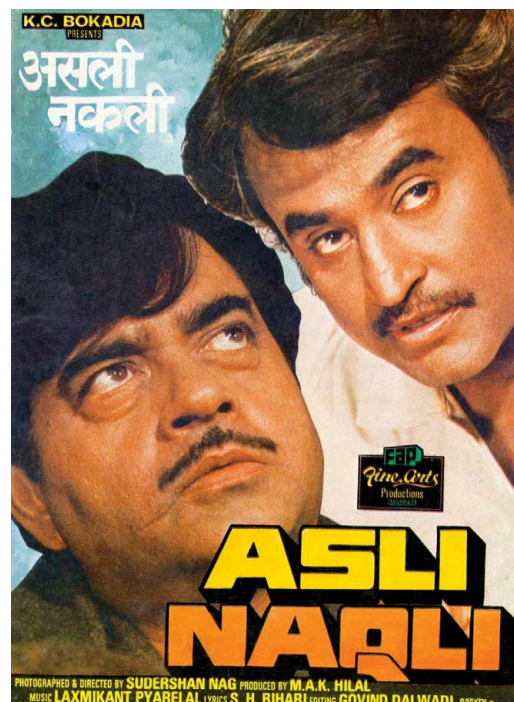
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PHOTOGRAPH: MEETESH TANEJA

# Shatrughan Sinha's Rapid fire



*Shatrughan Sinha*

**What's the worst part about being an actor?**

*Aayush Yadav, Udaipur*

You begin to act so much that you forget who you really are. And despite all the love and adulation, fame etc you remain lonely. It's lonely at the top, as they say.

**Social media can provoke and sustain protest in remarkable ways. Hashtag activists are all around us, fighting for their causes. And yet, their efforts don't seem to cohere into any real transformation. Your views?**

*Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North)*

Social media is an extremely powerful medium but like everything else it has its

pros and cons. So we need to be careful and exercise its power with extreme care.

**Going by the events in Ukraine, are we gearing towards a nuclear war?**

*Ramesh Garg, Meerut*

Well, difficult to say. Times and situations are very unpredictable. So the sensitivity of the issue must be kept in mind. Let's hope better sense prevails.

**How was your experience working with Rajinikanth in films like *Asli Naqli* and *Takrao*?**

*Abhijit Ghosh, 24 Parganas (North)*

Exceptional. It was a great opportunity for both of us to work together. He was fun to work with and we treated each other with mutual respect and admiration. He's such a down-to-earth person despite the heights of stardom he's reached. We

became friends and have been in touch ever since.

**Which part of the day do you like the best?**

*Ashwin Nair, Kochi*

Obviously it's nighttime. If you remember, I was called the man with the cocktail eyes or even bedroom eyes. Daytime is timepass time, preparation time, etc but nighttime is always romantic time, passion time, etc, etc. Use your imagination.

**Who is the person in your life that brought you the most happiness?**

*Neeraj Sabharwal, Chandigarh*

Besides my family and children, there could be some special people, special friends or special girlfriends.

**How do you feel when you meet younger actors who claim to have been inspired by you?**

*Dr. Devki Yadav, Ratlam*

**Is *aam aadmi* gullible?**

*Jaideep Sarkar, Kolkata*

*Aam aadmi* could be gullible at times but the leaders of the Aam Aadmi Party seem to be bright, sharp, and intelligent indeed.





**Cop universe: Sooryavanshi**



**Girl power: Dangal**

## 1st Prize

**How come advanced nations like the USA too are falling prey to the coronavirus?**

**Swarika Reddy, Hyderabad**

Coronavirus isn't selective. In fact it's quite 'secular' - as it doesn't discriminate on the basis of nationality or religion. It shouldn't come as a shock to you that it's targeting highly advanced countries like the USA as well as lesser-advanced countries in the Asian and American continents. And you'd be surprised to know that even in the US there is a strong anti-vaccine lobby.

## 2nd Prize

**Some people equate coronavirus to Kalki avatar. Your comment, please.**

**Manav Bisht, Kolkata**

I haven't heard about it being called the Kalki avatar but it's come to my notice that some people have been worshipping it as Corona Maiyya. And why not? It does seem to be a wake-up call delivered to us humans by the universe.

Extremely full of gratitude to all who have come up to me and said I inspire them. I always try to encourage and motivate them.

**In the film industry, how fine is the dividing line between hail and fail?**

**Jaideep Sarkar, Kolkata**

Every Friday is exam time and the line between hail and failure is as thick as the point of the needle. We all live on the edge. Don't get fooled by the happy images on social media.

**I think the Hindi film industry is struggling for survival. Your comments.**

**Tulsi Tankha, Ratlam**

Yes it is. We need new good content, right from the story, screenplay, music, action, drama, performing artiste - stagnation has set in every department and a change is desperately needed.

**Do you still watch films? Which is the most recent one that you've watched?**

**Suraj Nigam, Gurugram**

I recently watched Aamir Khan and Nitesh Tiwari's *Dangal* again. It's climax is quite emotional. Of the current lot, the movie which impressed me most was the Rohit Shetty directed *Sooryavanshi*. Besides solid performances from everyone, be it Akshay Kumar, Ajay Devgn, Ranveer Singh and Katrina Kaif, it had good action scenes as well. I've heard good things about mass-

favorite *Pushpa* as well.

**What gives you anxiety?**

**Puneet Chadha, Yamuna Nagar**

Generally speaking I'm not an anxious person. I'm always cool, calm, and in complete control of my emotions, thanks to the constant practice of yoga and meditation.

(Feature co-ordinated by **DEVESH SHARMA**)

Please note: The column doesn't reflect Shatrughan Sinha's political or personal views. His answers are given in jest and humour.

**Win!**  
**CASH PRIZES**

**1st prize**

**₹3000**

**2nd prize**

**₹2000**

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**YOUR QUESTIONS WILL BE FORWARDED TO:** Shatrughan Sinha, who insists his answers do not reflect his political and social views.

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# BOLLYWOOD AND BIOPICS

**I**t's raining biopics in Bollywood currently. So far, we have seen *Samrat Prithviraj*, which was a fictionalised account of the life of fabled warrior king Prithviraj Chauhan. It starred Akshay Kumar and newbie Manasi Chhillar and, while being appreciated for its grandeur, underperformed at the box office. Then, there was *Major*, which brought to life the valour of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan, the martyr of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Unnikrishnan was played by Telugu star Adivi Sesh. It was a huge hit in the South and even its Hindi version did tolerably well at the box office. The late Major was a brave soul who was instrumental in saving the lives of so many hostages held at the Taj Hotel, Mumbai during the attack, and the masses took to the film's patriotic appeal. Then, there was the Alia Bhatt starrer *Gangubai Kathiawadi*, which was based on the story of the notorious brothel keeper of the same name, chronicled in the book *Mafia Queens Of Mumbai*, written by S



Samrat Prithviraj



Major



Shabaash Mithu

Hussain Zaidi. Alia was praised for her powerful portrayal of Gangubai, and the film turned out to be a hit despite its taboo topic and being toplined by a female lead.

We're shortly going to see the release of *Shabaash Mithu*, a biopic based on the life of ace cricketer Mithali Raj. Mithali broke many a cricketing record and was known as the 'female Sachin'. Taapsee Pannu is essaying the

role, and going by the trailer, it's going to be a hell of a ride. Anushka Sharma has geared up to play Jhulan Goswami, Mithali's contemporary, in *Chakda Xpress*. Jhulan was said to be the fastest woman bowler India has produced so far, and going by Anushka's commitment towards her roles, fans are surely going to be in for a treat. Rajkumar Rao has been roped in to play the lead role in a film inspired

by the life of the visually impaired industrialist, Srikanth Bolla, who has a degree in engineering from the prestigious MIT and successfully runs Bollant Industries, which manufactures areca-based products and provides employment to several hundred people with disabilities.

Apart from sports heroes and entrepreneurs, war heroes too have caught the favour of Bollywood filmmakers. Akshay Kumar is going to be seen in *Gorkha*, a biopic based on the life of Major General Ian Cardozo, a veteran officer of the Indian Army's 5th Gorkha Rifles. Meghna Gulzar's *Sam Bahadur*, starring Vicky Kaushal, is going to bring the exploits of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw, a decorated war veteran whose career ranged from World War II to the 1971 war with Pakistan.

We do need to learn from history and it's great that more and more films are getting made. Let's hope they help inculcate the right lessons...

jitesh.pillai@wmm.co.in  
Twitter: @jiteshpillai